FELIX TELLS IT

LUCY PRATT

very good

FELIX TELLS IT

FELIX TELLS IT

BY

LUCY PRATT

AUTHOR OF "EZEKIEL" AND
"EZEKIEL EXPANDS"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
GORDON GRANT

NEW YORK AND LONDON
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1915

COPYRIGHT, 1915, BY
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

Episodes in this book are also protected by the following copyrights:
Copyright, 1910, 1912, by the Phillips Publishing Co.
Copyright, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914, by
The Pearson Publishing Company

Printed in the United States of America

TO
YOU WHO READ

THIS BOOK IS
DEDICATED

CONTENTS

PAGE

His Story Begins 1

CHAPTER

I. Mothers and Fathers 15

II. Peaty and Peat 35

III. When Father Forgot 64

IV. Mrs. Gaybud's Ring 96

V. When Father Ran for Mayor . . . 133

VI. David Dodd and I 166

VII. The Little Boy Across the Hall . . . 199

VIII. The Locked House 227

IX. White Chrysanthemums 253

X. The Big Family 278

XI. Peaty's Real Father and Mother . . 307

XII. The Last Place 331

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

"'Come out of there, you little devil,' he said" . 43

"'There's a ring out there in the window . . . he wants to buy it,' I said" 123

"'Do you see any likelihood of my ever getting out of here?' father asked" 147

"'*I will be a potato-bug!*' David answered her, stamping his feet" 190

"'Why, come, come—' he said, putting his arm round her shoulder" 249

"'It's an awful nice house, ain't it?'" 268

"'*Lie down, Peat!*' Peaty cried" 304

"Then Peaty jumped for the bridle" 325

FELIX TELLS IT

HIS STORY BEGINS

MY name is Felix Farnham Blanchard and I am ten years old. My father is in the insurance business and my mother is his wife. My little sister's name is Louise but we call her Luly for short. She is only six. The reason I am writing this started with something that happened at the breakfast table this morning. We were sitting there, all except Luly, because she is so small she wakes

up and has her breakfast early with Sarah. My father was looking at me quite hard across the table and pretty soon he asked me how I was getting on at school these days and if I managed to keep up with the other boys in the class. He said he supposed to be really satisfied I ought to keep ahead of them. But mother spoke then and said, "Oh no!" It wasn't good for boys to feel that they had always got to keep ahead. It wasn't healthful, she said, because it was apt to make them thin and nervous. But father said, "Oh, pshaw! I'll risk him getting thin and nervous," and mother interrupted right there. "*Getting* thin and nervous, Jo," she said. "Why he's so thin already I'm worried about him, and altogether too small for his age."

"Oh, pshaw!" father said again, "I'd risk any boy of ten overstudying. And as for Felix," he said, "it looks to me as if he were slow for his age if anything."

"Why he's too quick!" mother answered him.

"Oh no," father said. "And it's perfectly true the children are kept back nowadays, instead of being encouraged to go ahead. Just look at what children used to do. Look at Macaulay for instance. Why, he wrote a history when he was eight." And then he mentioned several others who had written books when they were only, I don't exactly remember, but when they were only five or six I believe. Of course that did make me seem slow for my age, and mother had just said I was small for my age, so that made it I was small and slow, too.

But father went on to finish and say there was a good deal of nonsense, all this talk about holding children back, and their nerves, and the best way was to encourage them to go ahead just as fast as they wanted to, and that wasn't usually any too fast. He asked me if I didn't think so, and I said, I guessed so, but I felt a little discouraged about starting to school, too. But when I was once started, I ran all the way, so that I was all out of breath

when I got there. I ran because one reason I wanted to seem quick, and another reason I was in such a hurry to ask Miss Pierce if she thought I was slow and small for my age. Miss Pierce is my teacher so she ought to know. That is the way you spell it, but you pronounce it "Purse"—the same as a pocketbook. So I ran all the way, and yet when I got there, I didn't like to ask her, either.

Miss Purse (I guess I'll spell it that way and then I won't have to explain every time about pronouncing it), she was getting things all ready for school, and she smiled at me once or twice and asked me what made me look so pale this morning. I almost asked her then if I was small and slow, it seemed to be as good a time as any I would have, when she spoke about my being pale, but I couldn't seem to begin it. It was when spelling came that everything began to encourage me more. You see, Miss Purse had us write our words, and for correcting, Newton Connors was the one I had to change with. Newton is the biggest

one in school, but he is so bad about his lessons that Miss Purse sometimes loses her patience with him. I said I had to change with him this morning, and when we passed back our papers, my words turned out to be all perfect and Newton's turned out to be all wrong. Miss Purse looked at him quite hard for a few minutes, and then she said, "Newton, I'm ashamed of you." And then she looked at him quite hard and long again. When Miss Purse looks at anyone very long it always makes me think of purple asters. I suppose it is because her eyes are something that color. So she kept on looking at Newton, and then she said again, "I'm ashamed of you Newton. Felix is the youngest boy in school and you are the oldest. Now I want you to look at the difference in those two papers." And she held them both up in plain sight.

"Why don't you try to do better, Newton?" Miss Purse said more patiently, "and not leave all the best spelling lessons to the youngest boy in the class?"

She struck the bell for recess then, and as they were all marching out, of course I felt so full of courage that I just stopped a minute and said, "Would you say I was about right for my age in spelling, Miss Purse?"

She smiled and said, "I should say you were quite right for your age in spelling, Felix."

"Do you think I'm very small for my age?" I asked it right out like that, almost before I thought.

"Small?" she said right after me. "Why no indeed, not any too small, you're just right Felix, just right exactly."

She looked in kind of a hurry, but I had such a good start then that I kept right on.

"Do you think I could write anything like a book?" I asked her. "Do I spell good enough for that?" I didn't ask her right off, like that, but I asked her, and the reason I asked her was, I was thinking of a book I saw once written by a boy who was so bad at spelling I should think he would have been ashamed to look at it when it was all done. But perhaps

Miss Purse was thinking of that, too, because she put her hand down on my shoulder and smiled at me, and said, "Why, yes indeed! And before you were through with it, I'll wager there wouldn't be a misspelled word in it!"

"Would you mind kind of looking it over —and changing them, if there were," I said. I was thinking of the boy who was so bad at spelling, and the way it looked.

"No," she said, "we'll have the *spelling all right.* You can depend on that! Go on and write your book, Felix!"

I felt more encouraged then, and I left her and went out and felt just like playing tag or something lively. It turned out to be *Pom Pom* which was just as good.

But I remembered what she said when father came home to lunch, and afterwards I was thinking about it in the library and looking at the books. There was one of the narrow shelves that seemed to be all about children. I copied the names of them so as not to forget. There was "The Child," and "What to Do

With the Child," and "How to Bring Up the Child," and "Training the Child," and "The Nature of the Child," and others with long words that I didn't copy but usually ending up with "The Child." And then mother came in and I asked her if anybody ever wrote a book about mothers or fathers. Mother looked surprised and asked me what I meant. And I said, why there seemed to be such a great many books written about children, did anybody ever write one about—well, mothers or fathers or maybe "The Nature of Mothers and Fathers," or anything like that.

Father was coming in the door just then and he looked as if perhaps I meant it to be saucy but I didn't. I was just wondering what the reason was there were so many books written about children, and not a one that I could see about mothers or fathers. Mother was kind of smiling though and she said, "I guess you'll have to write that book yourself, Felix, on 'The Nature of Mothers and Fathers.'" I asked her was that anything like

the one Macaulay wrote when he was eight, and then mother laughed and next father joined in, too. What I really wanted to know was, did anybody ever write a book like that. Because of course I wouldn't want to write it if they did. It would seem like copying. But I didn't dare ask it now, after they laughed. But wasn't it lucky, mother answered it without my asking. "No," she said, "I'll wager no one has ever written a book on 'The Nature of Mothers and Fathers.'" She was still smiling, too, and I couldn't see anything funny about it yet. I wonder if it was because she thought there were so many *kinds* of mothers and fathers, it would take too long to get through it. But then there are all kinds of children, too, and yet that didn't stop them writing about "The Child," either. Well, I asked her if I could bring the one about "The Nature of the Child" up here to my room, and she said I could. And now I am going to begin, anyway, to write one about mothers and fathers.

So far is the introduction. I was obliged to have it, on account of explaining how I happened to write it. There is one in "The Nature of the Child," explaining several things, too, so that makes it seem all right. It has taken me quite a while to write even so far. I wonder how long it took Macaulay to write his. Or if he ever lost his courage. I am glad I have got to the book itself. But it is getting dark and almost time for dinner, so I think I will stop till to-morrow and commence it then.

Felix Farnham Blanchard sat on one side of the dinner table between his father and mother at either end. His gray eyes were fixed a little absently on his plate and his father threw him a casual look of interest.

"Well, what have you been doing to-day, Felix?" he inquired briefly.

"Not much," answered Felix.

"He's been up in his room for the last hour," explained his mother. "Studying, weren't you, Felix?"

"No, I haven't been studying much," he raised his big eyes until they came on a line with his mother's. "I was writing that thing we were talking about this noon."

She looked at him inquiringly for a moment and then smiled as he had seen her do once before that day.

"'The Nature of Mothers and Fathers?' Come, Felix, you haven't been sitting cooped up in your room this beautiful afternoon wasting your time like that, have you?"

Felix's eyes wandered to the other end of the table.

"Father said I was old enough, and nobody's ever written it before." For a minute he thought his father was going to laugh, but that was a mistake. He was only going to speak.

"Look here, son," he began, "you took me almost too literally, didn't you? I didn't really mean to start you off writing a *book*. Of course you're altogether too young for that sort of thing yet."

"You said Macaulay did when he wasn't but eight."

"Well, Macaulay—of course he was an exception. But I'm afraid you're not a Macaulay, Felix. But as I said this morning," he glanced briefly at his wife, "I don't believe in holding children back."

"Now don't be foolish, Jo. You certainly don't believe in his cramping himself over a desk all the afternoon when he ought to be out in the fresh air. It's silly, Felix. Now don't waste your time like that any more."

"Oh, he won't lose any flesh over it! You needn't worry about that. And if he's going to get any satisfaction out of writing down his thoughts now and then, do let him. It's good practice."

"But the trouble is, if he once gets started on anything, he never knows when to leave it alone. I've got a little of that persistent streak myself, and he's got more. Now *don't* encourage him in any such nonsense, Jo!"

"Oh, pshaw! I'll risk either one of you!

Of course he isn't going into literary seclusion. And all the writing he'll do won't hurt him a bit. Let me see it, Felix—what you've done. Perhaps we can judge better then, whether you're putting in your time well or not."

Felix shrank uncomfortably.

"It isn't ready to see yet. I don't believe you'd like it." His eyes wandered uneasily between the two ends of the table. "I'd rather anybody didn't see it, anyway."

His mother looked at him with the maternal instinct stirring gently.

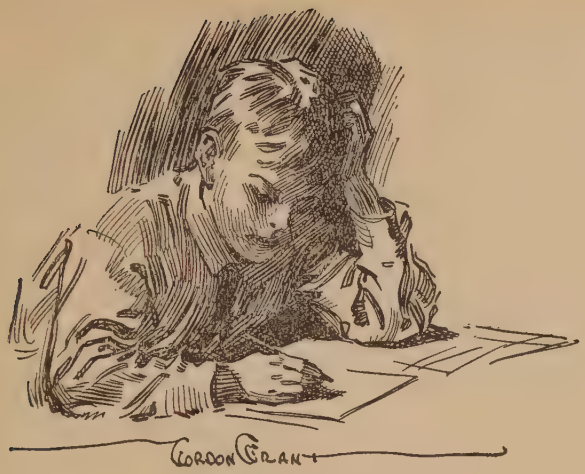
"Why, Felix, you wouldn't write anything that you wouldn't be willing to have your father and mother see, would you?"

"After you see it are you going to tell whether I can write any more or not?"

The people at either end of the table looked at each other while an old instinct of attraction stirred unexpectedly and mixed itself subtly with the parental one.

"Yes, after we've seen it," concluded the man of the family briefly.

Felix pondered over it after he had gone to bed. "If I don't tell things just right I s'pose it won't be any good. And if I do tell them just right maybe they won't always like it very well." His wide open eyes gazed thoughtfully through the darkness. . . . "In the books about children of course they didn't make up things. They had to be true if they said them." His eyes blinked slowly. . . . "I'll write one chapter and tell things right anyway. . . . Maybe—they won't let me write another but—I'll write one anyway. . . . I'll write it to-morrow." His eyes closed.



CHAPTER I

MOTHERS AND FATHERS

I HAVE decided that that is the shortest and best name for this book. Of course it sounds a little queer for the name of a book because most everybody knows there are lots of different kinds of mothers and the same with fathers. But that didn't stop them from naming a book "The Child," and most everybody knows there are lots of different kinds of children. Why, I could name a whole lot of different kinds right in our school, but that

wouldn't be about mothers and fathers and that is what this book is about. And so I will begin and describe them as well as I can from what I can see. Of course I will have to describe my own as they are the ones I am living with, and when you live with people you know their ways better than when you don't. I may speak of others later, if I meet them, but I am going to start with my own, and begin with to-day. As it turned out, it was a good one to begin with as anyone can see afterwards.

Mother was dressed in light blue when she came down to breakfast this morning. It looked pretty and I suppose she had it on on account of the days getting so much warmer. It is only the fourteenth of May, but it was so hot in school yesterday that Miss Purse kept the windows open all day. I suppose that is the reason mother put on anything so thin as light blue. She looks nice in blue I think, because her eyes are blue, and her hair, well it might look as if I was going to say her hair was blue, but of course it isn't. It is kind of

dark brown and real thick and soft, and when she came in this morning she looked quite tall but not any too thin. I don't like to have people too thin, but I guess I'd better not talk, because I'm not any too fat myself.

Father looked about the same as usual this morning, only except perhaps a little more lively, and he rubbed his hands together when he sat down at the table and said, "Well, this begins to look like summer doesn't it?" I forgot to tell the color of father's eyes, the same as I did mother's. I think they would be called mixed. Kind of yellow and brown and a little green. It sounds funny to write it, but I don't think there is really anything the matter with them for eyes. Sometimes he looks at you very steady with them, and it doesn't seem funny then, because it is apt to come when you have done something he didn't like. His hair is dark brown, something like mother's, and he wears a moustache just over his mouth. He usually takes up the paper just as soon as he sits down at the table, but if mother has any-

thing to say to him, she usually says it just the same. This morning, when he took it up and spoke about its being summer she said, "Have you ordered those seeds yet?"

He didn't answer right off. It looked almost as if he didn't hear on account of the paper, and yet he must have, too, because pretty soon he answered and said, why no, he forgot all about it.

Mother looked at him rather discouraged and said, "Well, there won't be any use planting them at all, if we wait much longer. The nasturtiums ought to have been in the ground a week ago." And then she said, "Now *will* you order them to-day?" asking it like a direct question.

Father looked almost as if he didn't hear again, but I guess there wasn't any real cause for it, because pretty soon he said, why he'd try, but why didn't she order them herself, over the telephone. She said she supposed she could, but she thought there might be some choice when you saw them.

"Let's see, it's the fourteenth," father replied, and mother said it right after him. "The fourteenth! Why, to-morrow's your birthday, isn't it!"

He said he never would have thought of it if she hadn't mentioned it, and mother answered him that was a sign of age. "I should think so," father answered, "thirty-nine."

This is the reason I said that to-day was a good one to begin with. Because a birthday is something that causes special preparations and that has made it different from just common days. But I didn't know until he said so that he was as old as thirty-nine. First it made it seem as if he was too old to make special preparations for, and yet when I thought, of course I could see that was all the more reason why we ought to try to make it kind of nice for him. I wonder how it feels to be as old as thirty-nine. I was thinking about it on the way to school and all the things you couldn't do. You couldn't run when everything seemed to make you feel that way, like the sun and the little

lights running round on the grass, and the birds singing the way they did this morning. If you were thirty-nine you just had to walk along the same as if it was like any other morning.

Or you couldn't do much about it if you saw a boy ahead that you wanted to catch. You just had to walk along the same as ever and leave it all to luck about catching up, if you were thirty-nine.

Or if you did catch up, you couldn't throw your hats up in the air to see which could throw the highest, or catch the other one or maybe lodge it up in a tree just for fun. You had to keep your own hat on your own head if you were thirty-nine.

Or you couldn't eat an apple if you had one given you, or throw the core to a squirrel if you saw one running by. You just had to say, "No, I thank you," to the apple and then not have any core to throw at anything, if you were thirty-nine.

I would rather be ten than thirty-nine, but it

made me feel so bad for father to think he was thirty-nine and couldn't help it, I kept thinking all the morning what I could get him for a present that would make it real nice for him and he would like better than anything else. I had sixty cents of my own that mother told me I could spend, if I wanted to, so as soon as school was out I came hurrying back to Hilton's. Hilton's is the biggest store in town and they sell most everything you could think of there. The trouble was though, I had never heard father speak especially of anything he would like, except one thing, and that was something I heard him tell mother this morning. It was before I was all dressed and I heard him telling her that he did wish she could find some stockings for him that didn't wear out the first minute. Mother didn't know it, I guess, but there is a kind that don't ever wear out. I saw them advertised in a magazine once. When I began thinking about it I thought I would rather have them for a surprise for father than anything else. Well, at first it looked as

if anybody couldn't tell how it would come out, either. Because you see when I got to Hilton's, I asked the first one I came to if she sold stockings that didn't ever wear out, and she smiled and said she didn't sell anything but gloves at that counter. But she said, "Wait a minute," and took the trouble to go down to the end of the counter and then pointed across and said she guessed I could get them two aisles over. So I went two aisles over and asked again. She smiled a little, too, and said she guessed she had what I wanted, and she got them out and said they claimed they didn't ever get holey. When I told her I would like to buy a pair she asked what size and I told her they were for a man thirty-nine years old. She smiled some more and said she couldn't tell entirely by that, but was he big or little. I told her he wasn't so very big or so very little, and then she kept on smiling and said did I think he had about a medium-size foot. I told her I wasn't really sure whether it was medium size or not, but I would run home and ask mother if she

would wait. She asked where I lived and I told her about a mile away on Cedar Street and she just kept right on smiling and said, Well, I wouldn't go home to ask your mother about it, but I'll tell you what. I'll let you have a pair of these medium sizes and if they're not right, why, you can change them. I think that was very nice of her and I bought them for thirty-nine cents. Wasn't that queer, it was just the same price as father's age. I hope they will fit.

I bought one more little thing, too, on the way out. It was a change purse, for small change, such as car-fares. Father always keeps his change in his side pockets, which of course is risky, and I thought it would be nice to have something kind of bright and pretty like that (it is red), to go with the stockings which are only for wear, of course.

There weren't any ladies at this counter, but I asked the price of it, and he said it was fifteen cents. I could afford it, so I asked him would it be all right for a man thirty-nine years old

to carry his change in. The man said he didn't see why it wouldn't do for anybody's change. He smiled too, just like both the ladies. I thought they were all very nice in that store, so pleasant with you. But something unexpected happened.

Just as I was coming out past the lady with all the gloves, I looked up and there was mother with some in her hand and asking for a pair of sixes like that. The lady told her she didn't have any sixes in that style, and then mother asked did she have any six-and-a-quarters. When she told her she didn't, not in that style, mother asked her did she have any tan ones. Not in that style she told her, and then mother looked kind of cross and asked her what *did* she have, and took a pair of gloves out of her shopping bag. She got them there, she said, and they burst the first time she put them on. The lady said she was sorry but they explained at the sale they weren't warranted. And mother looked a little taller and said it was an imposition to sell anything like

that, and the lady looked back and said the sale was just the way it was represented. Then mother told her to say no more or she'd report her. Then she turned round and saw me and said, "What in the world are you doing here, Felix?" The lady with the gloves saw me, too, and I was kind of sorry about it, because she was the one who had taken so much trouble for me. I don't believe she meant to be cross with mother, only sometimes when people are talking with you, they get you feeling that way when you didn't feel so a bit to start with. I have noticed that, myself.

On the way out, mother asked me what I'd been doing and I told her. She laughed and said it would be quite a day for him, wouldn't it, she had been buying him a present, too. It was a picture by Corot, and she said it would look nice in the hall by the dining-room door.

Father seemed to have forgotten about his birthday when he came home to lunch. Anyway he didn't speak of it, but just seemed in a hurry to get back. I hope he won't have to be

so busy to-morrow. Because we have got so many presents to take his attention. The cutest of all is what Luly did. Luly is only six, but she knew about its being father's birthday, and this afternoon she got mother to help her and she made him a sponge bag. She did it most all herself and of course the stitches aren't all very straight, but I think it is pretty good, too, for anybody only six. She showed it to me after school this afternoon, and made me promise I wouldn't tell. I said, "Honest and true, black and blue, lay me down and cut me in two." But of course I wouldn't have told anyway, even if I didn't say it, because she wants to surprise him and it would spoil it all if I did.

Mother wasn't there by the time I got home. Sarah said she had gone to play bridge. It was up to Mrs. Karl's, because she goes there every Wednesday afternoon to play it. Mother says she thinks once a week is enough for it. She says some women carry it to extremes. We didn't have dinner quite as early as we

most always do, on account of mother and father both being a little late. So I wrote quite a while on this chapter, and now I am trying to get it all done before I go to bed. That is the only thing that puzzles me. Because Miss Purse says when we end off a composition or anything like that, we must make it seem as if there was a good point to it all. Newton Connors wrote one yesterday and when he read it she said, "Why Newton, you seem to have used plenty of words but I can't see that there's any particular points to it."

Well I guess the point to this is——

Felix suddenly stopped writing and listened. He thought he heard his name called and he turned his head meditatively. Then his pencil began to move again as he looked back at the written page and finished his sentence. But again he turned his head, listening meditatively.

"Felix?" came a voice distinctly, "where are you? What are you doing?" Felix looked

across the room at his father standing in the doorway. "Your mother thinks you are in bed."

"Yes, I'm going right now." He glanced down at the notebook, a perceptible flush of agitation on his cheeks. "I was just writing a little."

"Writing what? Oh, I see. Let me see it, Felix. Wait a minute." He had turned around and gone out, and with a sudden startled remembrance of a conversation the day before, Felix's eyes swept the closely written pages before him. What had he been doing? What in the world had he been doing? He glanced guiltily at the empty doorway where his father had just stood. He had said he was coming back. He would be back directly—and find out about the presents! What would they say—his mother—and Luly! He shut the book quickly and involuntarily covered it with both his hands. But there came steps in the hall again and for a moment his ten-year-old brain reeled confusedly.

"Let me see this book of yours, Felix," went on his father again cheerfully.

Felix looked up at him furtively, just a perceptible nervous tremor in his small chin.

"I forgot I told you—you could see it," he began, "and I—can't let you see it now."

His father looked at him questioningly, an honest suspicion taking quick root in his mind.

"You don't want to have me see it, Felix? Why, I can't have you writing things that you won't let me see."

"I forgot—that you were going to see it!" stammered Felix.

"*Forgot?*" repeated his father in consternation, looking at him with his steady eyes. "You're writing something that you are ashamed to have me see? Give it to me Felix."

Felix snatched up the brown notebook from the desk in undisguised alarm and put it behind him. Then he looked defiantly up at his father, a deep, painful red working slowly out into his cheeks.

"I say I can't—let you see it!" he quavered,

"I told her—she—I *won't let you see it, anyhow!*"

"Felix! What are you saying to me! You're forgetting yourself, young man. Now, I want to see that book. I expect to be obeyed when I speak, Felix."

Felix clutched the brown notebook and looked up with combative, appealing eyes. "Honest and true, black and blue—" he could see the words shining up again from a closely written page, and his small, trembling jaw set itself for a final struggle.

"I don't want you—to see it!" he broke out desperately, "I—" he felt a firm hand on his shoulder and another one drawing a crumpled notebook away from him with a firm, strong grasp.

"Don't! Don't!" he pleaded shrilly, kicking out helplessly with furious, futile kicks at something that seemed monstrous, hideous. "I —promised! And mother's is in there too! But I—*promised* Luly!"

The man did not hear. He was standing

back—and looking down calmly, thoughtfully at a cramped looking page before him.

"Don't!"

His eyes turned slowly from the cramped page—looking down calmly, thoughtfully at a child sobbing weakly on the floor.

"Felix! . . . What is this all about—anyway?"

He asked it in a dazed, wondering way, and then again, involuntarily, his eyes turned back to the cramped page that told of a coming birthday present of stockings that would wear forever.

"Felix—I—I didn't understand! You—should have told me what you meant. Felix—come, get up, Boy!" He lifted him from the floor and put him down into a big chair which seemed to enfold him protectingly on all sides. Then he said something a little indistinctly—and turned suddenly and went out—leaving the child embraced by the big chair, still shaking with relaxed, exhausted sobs. . . .

But Felix sat up slowly and looked around

him. Over on the desk "The Nature of the Child" lay in its proud blue and gold cover and its shining binding, while beside it lay a poor little crumpled notebook entitled "Mothers and Fathers." He looked at it with a long, slow look and then he slipped down softly from the chair.

"I've got to ask him—how much he saw, anyway," he whispered, "and—and then tell mother and Luly about it."

He walked bravely out of the room and down the front stairs.

When he came back, "The Nature of the Child" and "Mothers and Fathers" still lay on the desk side by side. Felix looked across the room at them with a strange mixture of emotions in his red, throbbing eyes. . . . "He says ——" he crossed the room and took up the crumpled notebook with a faint, wavering smile, "he says it's a nice book—and to go on with it. . . . And he says—he didn't see anything about mother's or Luly's! Just mine."

He opened a bureau drawer and looked down at a pair of black stockings and a small, red, change purse lying on top of them.

"Of course they won't be a surprise now, but he says they're the very things he wanted!" The smile crept back to his eyes again and he glanced once more at the crumpled notebook. "He says—it's a nice book," he repeated just audibly, "and to go on with it. . . . But I guess I won't write any more now, except just to finish off that first chapter."

He sat down at his desk and looked down at the last written sentence——

"I guess the point of this is what a nice time you have when you get ready for your father's birthday."

He scratched it out with creeping, painstaking lines. Then he meditated deeply and wrote it down all over again.

"I guess the point of this is what a nice time you have when you get ready for your father's birthday." His pencil stopped and then went on again slowly. "And I guess we are all

ready now. A little accident has happened about the stockings and the purse, so they won't be a surprise to father after all. But mother's picture will and Luly's sponge bag, and I don't care much about anything now, because I'm so glad he didn't find out about them. Especially about Luly's sponge bag."

He closed the book and then opened it once more, still meditating. . . . Then again he wrote slowly.

"Sometimes even fathers and mothers can do things that seem almost like mistakes. I think it is usually when they think their children's thoughts are worse than they really are."

CHAPTER II

PEATY AND PEAT

I FELT a little discouraged after writing the first chapter, and I guess that is the reason I haven't written any since. It is almost a week since I finished it. But something happened yesterday that made me think I would start again on the second chapter.

I have to begin it by saying there is a little boy named Peaty, and he lives in a house that comes up back to back with our house. That is the way he always spells it, and that is what people call him. He has a dog, and perhaps you wouldn't believe it, if I tell you his name, but the dog's name is Peat. It probably

wouldn't have been named like that, but you see it was named before Peaty ever had him and he wouldn't change it. I think both their names must have been Peter to start with. But now everybody always calls them Peaty and Peat. If anybody feels any confused about it, all they have to do is look at them and see which is which.

But before anything more I will have to explain that Peaty most always looks quite dirty. That is, he hardly ever seems to look real clean. I have heard it is because his aunt doesn't like him very much and so she doesn't really care. His aunt is the one he lives with. Another thing, Peaty is apt to run away when a man or lady speaks to him, and he never will seem to look right at anybody unless he is so used to you he doesn't stop to think, and then he will look the same as anybody. He is that way with me but not with men or ladies, and he is apt to run away. Mother says he is sneaky and very deceitful in appearance. But I think it is really because he is so very bashful.

But the special thing that I am going to tell started yesterday about three o'clock in the afternoon. It was Saturday and that was why I wasn't in school, but instead was up in mother's room looking out her window. Well it happened that Peaty and Peat were just going by, and that reminded me of something. So I turned round and I said, "There go Peaty and Peat, Mother. Can't I go over and play with Peaty?"

"No I'd rather you didn't," mother said. "Why do you persist in picking out that boy to play with?" she asked me.

I told her I guessed it was because I liked to play with him.

"Well," she said, "I don't approve of this intimacy, Felix. He's not the sort of boy at all that I like to have you with."

Well, I asked if I could just go over there this afternoon, because we had something special we wanted to do.

"No," she said, "you can't, Felix. And for the present I'd rather not hear anything more

about Peaty. I'm perfectly sure he's not the sort of boy to do you any good."

I said I guessed I wouldn't go anywhere then, and she said that was a good idea, why in the world couldn't I stay quietly by myself for one afternoon. Well, just as she was saying it, the doorbell rang and then Sarah came up with a card. It said *Mrs. Colton Furbush.*

"Oh dear," mother said, kind of to herself in the glass, after Sarah went out. "Of all people! She's and unmitigated swindle, that woman," mother kind of muttered to herself, "and her calls are simply interminable."

She fussed round a little and then she said something else to herself as she went out. What she said was, "I could stand her better if she didn't lie so."

Well, just as she said it, someone whistled from out in the yard. I don't believe I ever mentioned his name before, but it was Harry Paine. The queer thing is, he is the same family as Mrs. Furbush and is her son by her first marriage. I guess she probably didn't know

he came the same time she did, because they live real near here and he is most always coming over. But I never spoke of him because I don't like him so very well. But I had to go down because he was whistling. And when I went through the hall mother was treating Mrs. Colton Furbush very nice. It must be kind of confusing to act that way when you feel just opposite. I was glad I didn't have to be like that with Harry Paine. It was too early for it, but as soon as I opened the door I saw that he was all dressed up in white flannels. He never seems to get dirty, no matter what, and I don't like to play with him much, so I couldn't really think of what to say to him.

"Hullo, Felix," he said, "you been on your roller skates any to-day?"

I said, no, I was sick of them, and he said, sick of them! Well, he guessed he wouldn't be sick of them if they belonged to him, I didn't really mean *sick* of them, did I?

I said, yes, I did mean sick of them, too, what would I say it for, if I didn't?

Well, of course, I could see he wanted to borrow them, so I got them out and it didn't take him more than three seconds to get them on.

"How far can I go with them?" he asked me.

"Oh, anywhere," I told him. "Just leave them on the back steps when you get through."

He didn't really wait for me to finish, and I didn't bother about him any more because I saw something out there on the sidewalk. It was Peaty and Peat. And Peaty was just standing there looking real hard at something in his hand. I guess he must have just picked it up. And Peat was looking at it, too.

"Hullo Peaty," I said as soon as I could get there. "What you found?"

Peaty held it up so I could see it, but he didn't say anything yet. I guess he was too surprised. I don't know as I blame him either, because it was a green chatelaine bag. I didn't know it was chatelaine then but I do now. It had quite a long gold chain on it, too, and it

had jewels kind of set in on the front side of the green.

Well, I guess I was about as surprised as Peaty.

"Where'd you get it?" I asked him. And Peaty pointed at the front door. "That lady in there, she dropped it," he said.

Of course I knew he meant Mrs. Colton Furbush, only I didn't have time to really say so, because something very unfortunate happened right then. You see there is a policeman with two stripes that always comes by our house just about four o'clock in the afternoon. He must always be going somewhere I guess. Anyway, it is always about the same time, and just as Peaty stood there, like that, he went by. Or he would have, if it hadn't been for Peaty. But you see he noticed the chatelaine bag. "Hullo," he said, "what's that?"

I have already said that Peaty was very easy to get scared and would almost always run when a man or lady spoke to him. Well, he didn't make any difference with the policeman,

and when he stopped and said, "Hullo, what's that," why Peaty was most scared to death.

"Hold on!" the policeman said, but Peaty started right off on the run, with Peat behind him. Of course it was really about the worst thing he could have done, on account of its making the policeman suspicious. And for that reason he started right off on the run, too. So I started right off on the run, too. And everybody kept it up on the run, like that, with Peaty first and me last, till we were clear round the back side of Peaty's house and then everybody stopped. The reason was—Peaty had squirmed right through a little hole under the back porch, so there really wasn't anything left of him.

Well, of course the policeman was quite fat, so he looked at the little hole as if he didn't really know just what to say, and then he hollered, "Come out of there, you little devil!"

I suppose that isn't very nice to write, but he said it, so I have to.

"Come out of there, you little devil," he said,

"'Come out of there, you little devil,' he said."

and I told you before, that Peaty was real bashful about talking, so he didn't give him any answer.

"Come out of there, you little thief!" the policeman hollered, but Peaty was too bashful to make him any reply.

"I say, come out of there before I wring your neck!" the policeman said, hollering right in the little hole. "Do you want to appear in court to-morrow morning?" he said. "Do you want to go to the reformatory for the summer?"

Well, when Peaty didn't make the slightest answer to that, I thought I would have to explain a little about him to the policeman. So I said, "He hears you all right, I guess, but he's so bashful he doesn't really like to answer."

"Bashful!" the policeman hollered, "bashful, did you say! Well, maybe he won't be feeling so bashful by the time I get through with him! Maybe he'll get over being so bashful by the time I rip the porch down!"

I was scared at that. Because I knew

Peaty's aunt would come out, if he ripped the porch down, and she would be no help at all. I was so scared I said, "Maybe if I spoke to him he would answer." I thought he was acquainted with me, so it might encourage him.

"Well, speak ahead," the policeman said. "And tell him from me that if he don't answer, I'll wring his neck."

I was getting most as scared as Peaty by this time, so I put my mouth down at the little hole and I was so kind of confused I said, "Do you want to go to the reformatory Peaty? He says if you answer he'll wring your neck."

You see I was a little mixed up and I guess I didn't encourage him as much as I meant to. Anyway he didn't feel encouraged enough to answer. And it seemed to make the policeman feel a little madder than before, if anything.

"Well, if you ain't the worst little couple of fools a going," he said, and he kind of jerked out his watch as if he had to get somewhere. "I can't waste any more time with you, either,"

he said, "but you can tell that young limber-legs from me that I'll settle with him yet, and before very long, too," he said.

The policeman walked off then and I just lay there watching the little hole. Pretty soon I spoke into it again.

"You can come out if you want to, Peaty," I said.

And Peaty came out.

He looked around the yard as if he was going to make sure, and then the first thing he said was a surprise. What he said was, "I ain't got the bag, but I guess I know who has."

Well, I thought for sure that Peaty was telling a lie.

"Why you have got it, too!" I said. "You showed it to me."

"No I ain't," he said. "I was so scared I dropped it. Peat's got it."

When he said that, of course it looked as if there was going to be trouble for somebody sure. I don't know whether Peaty was thinking about that or not, but he went round the

end of the house where it has another little porch to keep milk bottles on. It doesn't seem to ever look very nice anywhere round Peaty's house, but I think it is partly because his aunt is apt to throw things out, if they are in the way. This time there was an old clothes basket round there, turned upside down. I guess it got in the way so she threw it out. And what do you suppose? There was Peat lying out straight on the clothes basket with his front legs curled right round the chatelaine bag. It looked as if he did it to be smart, too, because when he saw us coming, he picked it up in his mouth and kind of flirted his tail. Well, I never stopped to think.

"Drop it, Peat!" I said. As it turned out it was the worst thing I could have done. The thing of it is, Peat has quite a queer disposition for a dog, and if he thinks you want him to do something, he always would rather do just the opposite. So when I hollered at him, "Drop it," he just jumped right off the clothes basket and started to run round in a circle,

something as if he was fooling us, and then right up the steps where they kept the milk bottles and into the house. That was the worst thing that he could have done, too. Because Peaty's aunt was there. I never thought Peaty's aunt was very nice because she always seemed so mean and bossy with Peaty. And it turned out she was just about the same with Peat. So she took the dish mop.

"Get right out of here," she said, something like a command, and began chasing him right round the room. Of course she ought to know the disposition Peat was, and not have spoken so bossy. Anyway, it just made him run under the sink as if he wouldn't do it then, anyhow.

"Get right out," she said, and she took the coal shovel and began kind of shoveling him out. She didn't seem to notice the chatelaine bag till she got him out and then she said, "What in creation's that you've brought in?"

That made Peat feel exactly the opposite from before. Because of course, with his dis-

position, he could see right off that she wanted to know, so he turned round and ran out to prevent her.

"You find out what he's got there!" she called out of the door. But nobody seemed to be listening much, because Peaty was running after Peat and I was running after Peaty. And Peat was quite a ways ahead. He had pushed under the side fence and was going straight for the mill away across the field. It backs up to the field and is where they make waste that you clean bicycles and things with. You can just see it from our back windows upstairs and there is kind of a creek there behind it, but it doesn't look really much more than a real wide brook. So they usually call it Mill Brook. I don't know whether Peat planned where he would go at first, but when he came to Mill Brook he went right across the little bridge that went over it, and then he turned round and sat down and looked back.

"Don't you say anything," Peaty said, real

low. "He's awful brave and likes to do just opposite. You have to know just how to manage him." And Peaty crouched down on his knees right there on the bridge so they were facing each other, with Peaty one end and Peat the other.

"It's all in being used to him," Peaty whispered, but he looked kind of scared, too. He could see if Peat dropped the chatelaine bag, it would go in the water. He could see it as plain as anything, and yet he hitched along a little on the bridge, and what do you suppose. "Drop it Peat," he said, and Peat had it right out over the water when he said it.

"Drop it, Peat," he said. "Drop it!"

Peat looked back as much as to say he wouldn't.

"Go ahead, drop it Peat," Peaty said.

And Peat just kept a hold.

Peaty kind of turned round and gave a look at me as much as to say, see? And then he looked back at Peat and spoke up quite a little louder.

"There might most anything happen to you Peat," he said. "Drop it Peat, or there might come along something and get you," he said.

Peat didn't drop it, on account of being so brave, I suppose, and Peaty hitched along a little on the bridge.

"There's other things could happen, too," he said. "Drop it I tell you, or there might come along something and peck at you," he said.

Peat looked as if he felt just a little scared then, but he held on to the chatelaine bag just the same, and Peaty hitched along a little more on the bridge.

" 'Tain't sensible to run right into danger, Peat," he said. "There might come along most anything and step on you," he said.

Peat crouched down real low when he said that, but he was just as brave as ever. Peaty was almost up to him, too, but he kept on talking just the same.

"Or there might come along something and *butt* you," he said.

Well, Peat was as scared as anything. I

could see that just to look at him. But he held on to the chatelaine bag, as if it was hang on or die, and Peaty stopped right there beside him and put his hand on his collar.

"Good for you, Peaty!" I hollered. "You've got it!" I hollered. "Snatch it quick, Peaty!"

Well, that was what I said, and it was awful. And I don't know whatever could make me do it. Because knowing about Peat's disposition and all, there didn't really seem any excuse. And yet I said it. Just that way. "Good for you, Peaty! You've got it! Snatch it quick, Peaty!"

And Peat, of course he heard me and just jerked his head right round and dropped it in the water.

Peaty turned round and gave one look at me. I felt awful when I saw the way he looked. He looked as if he wouldn't have thought I would have done it. He looked scared, too, but he never said a word. There wasn't really time because he jumped right in the water after it. It's an awfully deep brook,

so deep they call it a creek sometimes, and Peaty he didn't come up.

"Peaty!" I hollered, "*Peaty!*" And I ran so hard across the bridge I most fell in myself, and just when I got to the other side, Peaty came up. He caught hold of the bank and climbed out, only he looked as if he had been really drowned. And besides that he looked discouraged.

"I didn't get it that time," he said, "but I can make another try for it." And he dived right in there again. It is over his head he is so short and small, and I couldn't believe he would keep doing like that. I don't know what I was going to do. I guess I was going to jump in, too. Anyway, I was running down the bank and calling to him I was coming, and just as I got down there, he came up again, and this time he had the chatelaine bag in his hand. Peaty always looks kind of thin and small, but when he came out of the water this time he seemed to look so little and shivery that I couldn't really believe it, for a minute.

But mother said once she knew that miserable woman over there didn't half feed him, and I guess that is the trouble. She meant his aunt.

"You cold, Peaty?" I said, when he sat down on the bank.

"Kind of," he answered, only his teeth were chattering so that I knew it must be more than kind of, and I told him to run round a little and see if he wouldn't dry off.

"I guess we better be hurrying, hadn't we," he said. "We got to find that lady."

I thought so too, and I was glad the sun came out from a cloud real hot then, and Peaty ran round and began to dry off. Peat thought perhaps he would start for home when he found he couldn't get the chatelaine bag again, and we laid it right in the sun till it got so dry you wouldn't really know it had been wet, and then we started for home ourselves.

Peaty didn't talk much but it was nice and warm now, so his teeth didn't chatter at all. I couldn't help wondering if Mrs. Colton Furbush would be calling yet, and I'm almost sure

Peaty was thinking the same from what he said. Because when we were getting over the fence behind his house he dropped it, and it made it look like a good many accidents, but he hurried so to get it again that he slipped and turned a summersault. He didn't say anything right off because he came down so hard he saw stars I guess, and he just lay there blinking. But when he spoke it showed what he was thinking.

"We got to hurry, if I give her her purse," he said.

"You going to give it to her Peaty?" I asked him. I couldn't help thinking how he would most always run when he saw a man or lady.

"Course I am," he said. "What did you suppose?" And he got up and walked off as if he felt quite smart about it. But he didn't go far, either. He stopped as if there was something the matter. The matter was his aunt was coming out through the yard. I felt a little discouraged to see her, because she

wasn't so very nice and of course there couldn't anybody tell what she would say.

What she said was, "Anybody'd think there wasn't anything to do round here."

Peaty didn't say anything to that, and I thought she'd ask him what made him look so damp and dirty. But he usually looks quite dirty, and I guess she didn't notice about the dampness. Anyway the next thing she said was, "It's work, work, work, for some and play, play, play, for others. Now you get to your chores in short order."

"I got to return this where it belongs first," Peaty began saying, and then he stopped all of a sudden. The reason was, the policeman was walking right across the yard. I thought for sure Peaty would run. I guess the policeman thought so, too.

"Hold on now, hold on now," he said, and walked right up and took hold of his shoulder and reached down for the chatelaine bag. Peaty saw what he was doing and kept hold of it so tight that I thought at first the policeman

wouldn't get it. But of course he is much stronger than Peaty, and he just gave his wrist a little twist and then he took it right away. When he did it, Peaty looked at him for a minute something the way he did that time at me on the bridge. He looked as if he wouldn't have thought he would have done it. Then Peaty began to cry. I guess for one thing perhaps the policeman hurt him, and another thing I guess he was so discouraged he couldn't help it. But the policeman began to laugh.

"Well, it seems to be quite a loss to you," he said. "What's inside this thing, anyway?" And he began to unfasten the chatelaine bag.

Then Peaty did something that didn't seem anything like Peaty at all. I don't believe he could have done it if he hadn't been so worked up and all, because he ought to have seen it wouldn't do him any good. But he started in to prevent him.

"You stop!" he hollered. "You stop! It don't belong to you! You give it back! You stop opening that lady's purse! You—you

give it back!" And Peaty started right in to fight the policeman.

I didn't really blame him for it, and yet of course I could see it wouldn't do him any good, because the policeman was very broad and big, and I have already said Peaty was very narrow and little. He must have seen his size couldn't be in his favor, and yet he was so worked up and all, I guess it didn't make any difference to him.

"You—you give it back!" he kept crying. That was the way it sounded, kind of stammery and crying at the same time. "You—you give it back! You ain't no business to open her purse—when I was taking it to her! You ain't no right to do like that—when I was —t-taking it to her! *You give it back!*"

"Well, hold on now," the policeman said, and he took him in one hand and just laid him right down on the ground and put his foot on him, just the way you would on a croquet ball, to keep it still. Peaty could see now it wouldn't do him any good to fight any more, so he just

seemed to put his head down in the dirt, and cry, kind of to himself.

But he said one more thing down in the dirt there, too. What he said was, "You—you didn't have any business—to open that lady's —purse!"

Well, just then something unexpected happened. It was Peaty's aunt that did it. What she did was to walk up to the policeman so unexpected that he wasn't really looking for her, and take the chatelaine bag right out of his hand. Then she kind of brushed him off to one side and picked up Peaty from the ground.

"There," she said, "if you know where that belongs, you go and return it. You ain't needed any more," she said to the policeman.

Well, the policeman was so surprised he just looked at her and then he looked at her again. And then I thought perhaps he was going to laugh. But she wasn't seeming to bother with him any more, and I could see it wasn't any time to stop and find out whether he laughed or not. Because it looked as if Peaty's aunt

was on our side now and she might change any minute. Besides it wasn't sure about the policeman, and if he wanted, he could interfere again any minute, too.

"Come on Peaty," I said, and I took hold of his hand and we started to go right out through the yard.

Peaty's face was real streaked and dirty looking, from what had happened, and of course he was kind of streaked and muddy all over from the brook and all, but he began smiling just a little, too.

"I guess she'll be surprised when I give it to her," he said.

He looked down at the chatelaine bag and walked along as if he couldn't wait to get there, and we came round by the front of the house. It looked as if we couldn't have arranged it better. Because just as we came round there, the front door opened and there were mother and Mrs. Colton Furbush standing there together.

They didn't see us at first, so we went across

the grass a little farther, and then Peaty stopped.

"You give it to her," he whispered. He was scared.

Well, just then Mrs. Colton Furbush looked at us. She is quite fat and large and looked as if she had on so many clothes and things it made her look largcr. I guess I stopped, myself. I was thinking what mother said. About her telling lies and all, and yet mother didn't seem to be bothering any about that, either.

She was looking at us and she kept right on talking to Mrs. Furbush, and then she began to smile. And I could hear what she said quite plainly.

"Look!" I could hear her say, "see what my son has picked up for his afternoon companion!"

And then she smiled the way she is apt to when she has company, and kind of reached out her hand to me.

"Oh, I tell you Mrs. Furbush, it's a pretty

serious business, this bringing up boys!" she said, still smiling.

But Mrs. Furbush was looking right at her bag as if she couldn't believe it. "Why, did I drop my bag?" she said. "Why, I hadn't missed it. Did I drop it?"

I told her yes, and Peaty found it.

I thought he would run away then. But he didn't. He just stood there. Of course he looked real pale and small, and of course he was streaked too, but he stood there, and that was real brave for Peaty.

"Why, how careless of me!" she said. "And this is Peaty, is it?"

She smiled at him and then she smiled back at mother, as if it was real funny. "Our companions are sometimes helpful after all!" she said. Then she turned to go down the walk.

"Good-by," she said, and smiled some more.

And mother was still looking just the way she did when she said that about my companion for the afternoon, and bringing up boys. So I stood there beside of Peaty and she stood

there in the doorway, reaching out her hand to me and smiling. When you think of it, of course, her own companion for the afternoon had been kind of queer, but from the looks, I don't think that mother was worrying any about that.

"Good-by," she said to Mrs. Colton Furbush.

CHAPTER III

WHEN FATHER FORGOT

WHEN father came home to dinner last night he didn't look tired the way he sometimes does, but quite fresh, and as he sat down at the table he said, "Well, Louise, it looks as if I was getting into politics."

Of course, you know Louise is my mother. I told you that she and my little sister are named the same, only everybody always calls

my little sister Luly so as not to get them mixed up. But as I said just now, father said, "Well, Louise, it looks as if I was getting into politics."

Mother looked quite surprised and repeated it after him.

"Politics?" she said. "Why, not seriously, you don't mean? You don't mean to say you're thinking of running for anything, do you?"

Father kind of smiled and took a spoonful of soup and said well, he didn't know for sure just yet, but they had asked him would he consider running for Mayor.

"Mayor!" Mother said, "Mayor! Why, Jo, what are you thinking of? You aren't prominent enough to run for Mayor are you?"

Father replied rather quick that he didn't know why not, if he wanted to, but the question was did he want to.

"Well!" mother said, "I should think the question was do the citizens want you to."

"I told you they had asked me," father an-

swered, rather quick again. "Some of the leading citizens have asked me to-day if I would be willing to consider it."

"Well, what in the world did you tell them?" mother said, as if she was really a little too much surprised to say very much more about it.

"Why, I told them I would consider it," father answered. "By the way, a newspaper man is coming to see me this evening. They seem to be trying to bring me before the public."

"Well, well," she said, and smiled this time as if she had had a good deal of news, too. "Well, well," she said. "These are honors that I never expected. I'm sorry that I'm not going to be here this evening, myself, with all this excitement going on.

"You going to the choral society?" he asked her.

"Yes, I suppose I've got to," she replied. "I don't feel in the mood of it either. It's too hot. But I told Fanny Maynard I'd go with

her so I suppose I've got to. It's almost time to be starting, too. Is it too much to ask you to put Luly to bed?" she said, after stopping a little. "You see, I told Sarah and Lizzie they could both go out this evening. Felix won't need any help, if you will just see that he gets started in good season."

"What time, eight o'clock?"

"Yes, promptly at eight. He's been very slow lately about getting to bed, and he must be there on time to-night."

"Slow?" father repeated.

"Why yes," she answered, "it takes him so long to get there, after he starts."

"Well, I'll see that they both get there on time," father said, glancing at me, "and we'll have no nonsense about it. By the way, Felix," he said, without taking off his glance, "I thought you were going to meet me at Ferber's this afternoon to see about your shoes. Where were you?"

He meant my pumps for dancing-school. Sarah spoiled my regular pair by getting one

in the fireplace one day, when she was cleaning my room, and I was going to get some new ones this afternoon. But I forgot it and there wasn't anything else I could say for an excuse.

"Forgot it!" father said, as if that was worse than not any excuse at all. "Well, it looks to me as if you'd be obliged to miss your dancing-school to-morrow."

I didn't like it when he said that, because it was going to be the last one, and in the evening, with ice cream and all. I began telling him all about it, because it didn't seem as if I could miss it, anyway.

"Well, why didn't you think of that this afternoon?" he asked. "You see I can't do anything about it to-morrow. I shall be busy every minute. Besides I'm not so sure it wouldn't be a very good thing for you to miss your party, Felix," he said. "You know the forgetting habit is about as undesirable a one as a person can possess. I think it might be a most excellent thing for your memory to miss your party."

I turned round to mother then, because I thought perhaps she would help me out, but father began to tell her something more about the newspaper man that was coming, and I could see I would have to wait. It didn't seem so very long then, either, before she was starting off for the choral society, and we were out on the side porch watching her as she went out the gate. They are having it in our church now, just a little way down the street, and Mrs. Maynard only lives next door. Mother looked very nice, I thought, as she went over to get her, because she had on something very thin and white and gauzy, on account of its being so hot. Her dress was like that and the long thing she had over it seemed to be like that too, and she picked up her skirt and turned her head as she went out the gate and said, "Oh, won't you go up and open the west blinds in Felix's room, Jo? It will cool the room off, before he goes to bed."

Father said, yes, and she must go on or she'd be late, and then he walked up and down the

porch a little with his hands in his pockets, and I got the courage to ask him if I was going to the dancing party to-morrow.

"Well, I don't know, Felix," he said. "I don't see how you can go without shoes, do you?"

I didn't know whether he meant by that, in my stocking feet or just barefooted, but either way, I didn't think I would like it much.

"Where are the shoes you've been wearing?" he asked rather quick, and I told him they were upstairs in my room.

"Well, I'll take a look at them when I go up to open the blinds and let you know," he answered, and he walked round a little more, with his hands in his pockets, and then turned round and went in. I knew it wouldn't do any good to take a look at them though, because one of them had a big hole burned in it. So I was feeling almost discouraged when Luly came out of the door with her little new, washable doll that mother got for her. She climbed up in the big chair with it and I

watched her taking its clothes off for a minute, and then I got into the hammock to cool off.

I was thinking how nice it was to lie there like that, with the air bringing the smell of roses to you, when I heard some steps rather slow and quite light, and when I looked up, there was a lady with a red skirt on and something like a red handkerchief on her head. A gypsy lady it was.

"Is anybody at home?" She said it in a kind of little smiling voice, and as if she couldn't talk very plain.

I said yes, my father was, and I would call him. He was sitting by the window with the evening paper when I went in, but he hopped up very brisk and pleasant. He looked a little disappointed though, when he came out, and without stopping at all for her to describe what she came for, he shook his head at her and said, "No, I don't care for a thing."

He needn't have said that, because she really didn't have anything to sell. So what she said was, "I tell your fortune?" Just like that.

Father had his paper and was glancing at it, but he shook his head. "No," he said.

"I see bright future for you," the lady said, in the same little smiling voice. "I tell you by cards or hand." That was the way she talked.

"No!" father said. I guess perhaps he thought she was deaf, because she couldn't talk very plain. Anyway, he hollered it out very clear. "No," he said, "I don't care for a thing!"

I don't know what father kept saying he didn't care for a thing for, because she didn't have anything to sell, anyway, and it sounded very queer. I really hoped she didn't notice it, and from what she said maybe she didn't.

"I tell past or future," she said. "I tell love or business."

"No, I don't want a thing!" father hollered. "I'm busy!"

I was afraid she would think he was crazy then, for sure, but she turned round just as pleasant as ever.

"Some other time?" she said, but father

turned round, too, and went in, not really waiting for a complete answer.

"Good Lord," I heard him say to himself, and just then Luly went running out into the yard. It was to get a rose for the gypsy lady. I saw her holding it up and giving it to her, right out there by the gate, and the gypsy lady stood there smiling down at her. But I noticed her step back very quick, too. It was because there was a man hurrying into the yard, right past her.

"Hullo, young feller," the man said. "Is your father in?"

But before he had really said it, there was father right out on the steps, himself.

"Hullo, Barker," he said. It was the newspaper man that wanted to have father Mayor.

"How are you, Mr. Blanchard?" he answered, and then they both sat down on the porch, and I got into the hammock again, to cool off.

It was just as I said in the beginning about seeing everything out through the end of the

porch. Only you could see it all much brighter now, because the moon was up. So the leaves of the sycamore tree looked all silvery as the breeze blew them in and out, and the big elm over by the fence seemed to stand out very plain. It was something like lying down in a nice, lovely bath after a hot day. Only of course, seeing the moon, and the sycamore and the elm, made it a little different too, because you couldn't have done that, if you were taking a bath. And you couldn't have smelled the roses the way you could now either, or you couldn't have heard Mr. Barker talking to your father or your father talking to Mr. Barker. So I lay there kind of listening, and watching, and wondering if father was going to let me go to the dancing party, when Mr. Barker spoke up louder than before.

"Of course you know the *Despatch* is going to boom you for Mayor, Mr. Blanchard," he said.

I could hear father laugh then.

"Oh, nonsense!" he said, "I don't believe I'm the man for Mayor."

"Yes, you are, just the man," Mr. Barker answered, "just the man exactly. And we're going to begin on you early enough so that by fall, people will know for sure who you are."

"Well, how are you going to begin?" father asked, laughing some more. "Black headlines and a photograph?"

I couldn't help wishing the gypsy lady could see him now, he seemed to feel so much more pleasant and like talking.

"No, we're going to begin at the beginning," Mr. Barker said, "and lead up to it gradually," and he took out his notebook then and asked him where he was born.

The moon was right over the sycamore now, and when I looked at it this time, it almost made me jump because the Man in the Moon was watching everything so very bright and plain. I never really noticed before how very bright and plain he could look. Why, it seemed as if he was just watching everything as hard

as he could watch, and at the same time smiling, just watching and smiling, watching and smiling. If it hadn't been for that, perhaps it wouldn't have happened the way it did. But I couldn't seem to notice anything else, I was looking so hard, first at the Man in the Moon, and then at the stars keeping so still all round him. And pretty soon of course I began to understand why it was that they kept so still and never made the least disturbance. It was because the Man in the Moon was keeping watch, and they knew they couldn't.

So they just looked like little jewels sparkling, and the Man in the Moon looked like a great big jewel, smiling, and the clouds seemed to sail round, something like ships, but without making the least noise or disturbance, and everything up there was in just perfect order, till something happened. It will sound strange when I tell it, but it happened just the same, and this was it. The Man in the Moon went out.

And what I am going to tell now will sound

strange too, I suppose. But it didn't seem so then, it seemed so very natural. Like this.

I looked up for the Man in the Moon to make sure he wasn't there, and then I looked over at father and Mr. Barker, and pretty soon I spoke. "The Man in the Moon's gone out," I said.

"What?" father asked, turning his head round so that I could see his face very plainly in the light. "What did you say, Felix? The Man in the Moon's gone out?"

"Yes," I replied, "and I guess it's going to bring trouble, too."

I said that, because I could see from the looks of the stars and clouds there was already a little disturbance there. Father seemed to see it, too. Anyway, he looked at Mr. Barker and spoke again. "The Man in the Moon's gone out," he said. And Mr. Barker was the most surprised of all.

"Gone out!" he answered, "gone out where? Pshaw! What caused him to do that? You can't mean to say he's gone for good! You

can't mean to say there isn't any Man in the Moon!"

Yes, I told him, there wasn't any Man in the Moon.

"Not any Man in the Moon!" Mr. Barker kept saying, "Why it's an imposition for such a thing to happen! It's an imposition for him to do like that without giving the least notice!"

Father seemed to be thinking very hard and deep.

"Of course it is," he said. "And it shows you couldn't really trust him, doesn't it? It proves he wasn't the right man for the place, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does," replied Mr. Barker, turning his head round so that I could see his face very plain, too.

" 'Tisn't everybody that could fill the place, either," father said, pretty soon. "It must be quite heavy work to be the Man in the Moon."

"Quite heavy work," answered Mr. Barker, "but I guess you're the man for it, too."

"What!" father hollered, "why you just told me I had to be Mayor!"

"I know I did," replied Mr. Barker. "But of course, then we didn't know about this vacancy. And most anybody can be Mayor."

"That's so," said father. "Most anybody can be Mayor. I could be Mayor all right myself. But as for the Man in the Moon, why, I don't really believe I could give satisfaction."

"Oh, nonsense!" Mr. Barker exclaimed. "You're just the man for it! Just the man exactly!"

"Well, I don't know," father answered him, quite worried, and just then mother came walking in the yard.

Father looked at her a minute, and then he said, "Well, it looks as if I was getting into politics, Louise. They have just asked me will I consider being Man in the Moon."

"Man in the Moon!" mother exclaimed. "Man in the Moon! Why Jo, you never could do it in the world. You aren't prominent enough for it."

"Well, I don't know why not, if I wanted to," father answered her. "The question is, do I want to."

"You aren't fitted for it, Jo," she said. "You aren't prominent enough for it." And she came right up the steps in the moonlight, and walked straight in through the door.

Father looked after her and Mr. Barker looked after her, and then they both turned their heads quite slow as if they were thinking again, and Mr. Barker said, "You follow me."

I was afraid to look any more then, because I just knew they were going right up to the moon. I was almost afraid to move. But I listened. And it got stiller and stiller till I knew I was left there all alone and then it seemed to get stiller than before. And the sycamore and the big elm over by the fence stood out more plain than ever, till at last it was so strange and lonesome that I didn't believe I could stand it any longer. I am not quite positive that I was going to call mother, but anyway, I didn't have to. Because just

as I turned my head a little, there she was, with the gauzy dress on, coming out again on the porch. And she raised her hand up like a circle and pointed right at the moon. I couldn't help noticing how it made her red ruby catch the light and glisten, almost like a bright red drop of blood. But she didn't notice that. She was pointing up and smiling, and there was father smiling up there in the moon.

"Oh, what a gorgeous moon!" she said, and stopped. "What a gorgeous—but what's this?" And her hand dropped down. "Felix! What's this? Felix!" she said, with the frightened eyes and her voice so very quick. "Why, I've been looking everywhere! Where's your father? Where's Luly?"

I guess I didn't answer right off, because I felt a little confused when she asked me, and all I could remember was about the moon. So I pointed up there now to explain it to her, I suppose.

"Felix!" she said again, and put her hands down on my shoulders and shook me a little.

"You've been asleep! Wake up, child! Look at me, Felix! Where's your father? Where's Luly?"

I tried to remember but I guess I just pointed at the moon again. Because mother put her hand up to her throat, the way she does when she's worried and frightened about something.

"Oh, mercy!" I heard her whisper.

And hearing her say that made me sensible again, and I told her about father and Mr. Barker sitting right there on the steps.

"Yes?" she said very quick. "And where was Luly when your father was talking to Mr. Barker?"

"Why, she was in the big chair," I answered, because now I remembered all about it.

"Yes?" mother said again very quick, "and who took her out of the big chair? Father?"

"I don't know," I said. But just as I spoke, the gate swung open, and mother went running to the steps. It was father coming up the walk alone.

Mother just looked at him and didn't wait for anything.

"Where's Luly, Jo?" she said.

Father looked up at her for a minute as if he was a little puzzled and didn't quite understand.

"What?" he said. "Luly? Why, I don't know. What do you say, Louise? Luly? Why, she's in bed, isn't she?"

"Did you put her to bed?" she asked him.

"What?" father said again. "Put her to bed? Why, no. I didn't put her to bed, did I?"

"No, you didn't!" Mother answered, with that dreadful frightened look in her eyes. "But I left her with you! You said you would! And now—Oh, Jo!" she cried, and I think she was really crying, then, "Oh, Jo, where is she?"

Father came walking up the steps then, without any nonsense.

"Where is she?" he said. "Why, she must be in bed! She must have gone to bed, herself."

"No, she didn't!" mother answered. "I've been all over the house. Her bed hasn't been touched!"

Just then I remembered something. It was about the gypsy lady and the rose. And mother turned round to me, then, too.

"Can't you remember Felix?" she asked me, and she seemed to be kind of holding her breath in. "Think!" she said. "Can't you remember when you saw her last?"

"Yes, I can remember it now," I answered. "It was when the gypsy woman was here. Luly picked a rose and ran out to give it to her."

"The gypsy woman?" mother asked very low, and she was staring at me and then at father, in such a strange way it didn't really look like mother. "The gypsy woman?" she said.

She kind of reached out her arm to father, as if she couldn't really say anything more right then, and father was just staring at me, too. Perhaps it was the moonlight that made things look so queer, but for a minute it didn't

look like father, either. But he spoke then, and I could see it was.

"What are you saying Felix?" he said, very stern. "Be sure that you are right."

"She ran after her with a rose," I said again.

"But didn't she come back?" Mother's voice sounded something like sharp needles.

"I don't know," I said. "It was when Mr. Barker came."

That was the thing that confused me every time I thought of it. But father began talking very fast then, and walking up and down as if he didn't know what to do next.

"There's been someone here every instant this evening!" he said. "You wouldn't think it strange I'd forgotten everything else Louise, if you——"

But father didn't finish his sentence, because mother didn't hear. She was leaning up against a pillar of the porch and her head was dropping back with her throat showing very plain. I said mother looked white before, but now when she was leaning on the pillar and her

head was dropping back, it almost looked as if her face and her throat and her dress were all just exactly the same color. So white.

"Louise!" father said, and he jumped over there and caught her. She was really going to fall. "Louise!" he said again. "Be a brave girl! We're going to find her right away!"

Mother opened her eyes and looked at him, and then she seemed to stand up alone and look at him again.

"There've been gypsies—camping around here on the outskirts for the last three weeks —" she said very slow, in something like a whisper. "There was a child kidnapped on the west side of the city yesterday."

Father didn't say anything for a minute, but his face seemed kind of gray and tight looking.

"Wait!" he kind of whispered back. "Wait! They've probably got her at the police station now! Just wait!"

And father went running off the steps right while he was talking.

And I felt so frightened I didn't say anything at first, till mother turned round and held out her arms, and then we both sat down together on the steps.

"You ought to be in bed, Felix," she said, with her voice just a little trembly. "Why don't Sarah and Lizzie come home?"

And then she went right on talking, as if to herself.

"I can't go upstairs with you, there might someone come, or I can't send you up there all alone, or I can't go away and leave you, or I can't stay here!"

Mother got up then with her eyes all frightened again, and then she went up on the porch and walked up and down till pretty soon she stopped near the opening at the end, and stood there very still for a minute looking out.

"It's a lovely moon," she said, with her voice very small, and then she turned round again. "Oh, I can't stand this!" I could hear her whisper. "Come, Felix," she said, "we'll walk a

little. Your father ought to be back," she said, as we went down the steps and onto the grass. "Which rosebush did you say, it was? Where was it Luly picked the rose?"

It seemed strange to be walking with mother like that, in the night, out there on the grass, and I guess she thought so, too.

"It's dreadful for you to be up," she said. "Which rosebush did you say it was? Where was it Luly picked the rose?"

I showed her then the very one. It was high, and mother stood very still beside it for a minute, and then she reached up her hand and picked a rose. It was a red rose. And it seemed a little queer, but when she did it, I saw her red ruby catch the light and glisten the way it did that time before, just like a drop of blood. Then her hand dropped down, and she was standing very still by the rosebush and looking down.

I stooped down and picked up something on the grass. It was Luly's little new washable doll, and it only had one shoe on. Mother

kind of snatched it up to her, and then she just broke right out crying.

"Oh, my little girl!" I could hear her whisper. "My little, little girl!"

But we both stopped and listened, because the gate was swinging open. And mother turned round and ran across the grass.

It was father coming back alone.

He didn't say anything at first, but she looked at him and saw his face, and then Luly's little doll just dropped out of her hands and fell down in the dirt.

But a policeman came in behind father then, and he looked at mother and then he stooped down and picked up Luly's doll without saying anything. He looked as if he felt real sorry though, and after a little while he kind of cleared his throat and spoke, too. What he said was, "Well, now I tell you, Mrs. Blanchard, don't you begin borrowing trouble yet. We're going to sift this thing right down," he said. "We're going to hunt down them gypsy camps right now, and by ginger we'll find

your little girl for you before the sun rises tomorrow morning," he said.

That was the way he talked. "And what's more we'll show them gypsies we ain't going to stand fer 'em," he said.

Mother held out her hand and smiled just a little and asked him wouldn't he come in.

"Yes I will," he answered. "I want to be straight on the affair if I'm going to handle it," he said. "I want to know what that was the little girl done about a rose and who it was saw the episode."

We were all going up the steps now, and father was leading the way into the library.

"Have a chair," he said to the policeman.

Mother kind of dropped down on one end of the long, highback sofa by the door, and father sat down, too, for just a minute, and put his hand up on her shoulder. I got up there, too, and then father reached right up from where he was and turned the lights on. The policeman hadn't really sat down at all, and when the lights came on he stood there for

a minute looking at us all, and I thought his face seemed queer and different. But he just stood there looking at us very steady. And it will sound so strange if I tell why, that I don't believe I will. Instead I'll tell what happened, because that explains it, anyway.

As I said, he stood there looking, and father was talking quite low to mother, as if he had forgotten about him for a minute, and the policeman acted as if he had forgotten what he came for anyway, till by and by he said something to himself. I could only just hear it. What he said was, "Well, by ginger!"

That doesn't explain it either. But just exactly as he was saying it, there came something else. It started with a little sound. I don't know whether anybody really heard it, but the policeman took a step forward.

At that very second the little sound came again and mother screamed. I don't think I had ever heard mother scream before, but she did then, and she jumped up something as if

someone had fired a gun off, and she fell down on her knees on the floor, right there by the corner of the sofa, and she screamed again, only it was kind of smothered as if she was talking at the same time, too.

"She's been asleep! She's been asleep! Oh, my little girl! My little girl!" And she pulled Luly down in her arms, kissing her and crying and talking to her. "*Oh, she's been asleep!* Oh, my little, little girl!"

And the policeman just stood there looking.

Father was up on the floor looking too, without saying a single word, but putting his hand up to his eyes as if the lights were dazzling him. And mother got up from the floor with Luly in her arms.

"You must forgive me," she said, kind of glancing from father to the policeman, as if she felt perhaps a little ashamed, "but it was a great shock. I'm afraid I wasn't quite prepared for it," she said, brushing off her eyes, but smiling at the same time, too. I'm afraid I wasn't quite prepared. And she bent her

head and wiped off some tears where they had dropped down on Luly's face.

"Come, Jo," she said, "will you—carry her upstairs?"

And then we seemed to be out there on the porch, just the policeman and I, all alone. Because father was going upstairs with Luly in his arms and mother very close beside him.

"Well, Sonny, you've had quite a lively evening of it, haven't you?" the policeman said, and he took out his handkerchief and blew his nose quite hard, and just then father turned round on the stairs.

"Sit down Carter, I want to see you," he said with a kind of queer smile. "I'll be back in a minute. Come Felix!" he said, and I went up behind them.

Mother looked at father for a minute, after he had laid Luly on the bed and then she put her hands up on his shoulders, and I thought perhaps she was going to laugh or perhaps cry some more, either one. "Oh, Jo Blanchard!" she said.

Father sat down in a chair and passed his hand across his forehead. I couldn't help wondering if he was remembering what he said at dinner-time about getting us both to bed at just the proper time. "Oh, Jo Blanchard!" mother said again. "Well, there's one thing I'm sure of, and that is I'll never look a policeman in the face again as long as I live."

"I don't know as I blame you," father replied.

That was all he said, and he just stared straight ahead, rather gloomy, at something over by the closet door. I couldn't tell whether he really saw what it was or not. I couldn't even tell whether I wanted to have him see it. The reason for that was—it was one of my dancing slippers. The one with the big hole burned in it. The other one, I suppose, was just inside the closet. I am not sure of that, but anyway it made me remember how he was going to take a look at them, when he came up to open the west blinds, and decide about the party. I tried to see if I could tell by his looks

which way he had decided, but I couldn't, and I thought perhaps it would be a good time to ask him and find out.

I'm not quite sure just what I said, but I know when I was almost through I told him I wouldn't forget again, if I could only go.

He didn't answer right off, and it looked as if perhaps he was thinking of a few things, himself. Then he mumbled something. But I heard it.

"I guess we can manage it somehow," he said, and he looked at mother. But I don't think she heard. Because mother was opening the west blinds.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. GAYBUD'S RING

MOTHER gave a bridge party last Tuesday. I remember it because something else happened that day. Something important, I mean. It was something to do with Peaty. Of course, you know that where Peaty is, why, there Peat is apt to be, too. That is, they are almost always together. They were together last Tuesday afternoon just as mother's bridge party was coming out, and I was there, too. It was in the side yard where we could see them very

well. Of course, they didn't pay any attention to us, and we didn't to them, either. Not very much. Instead, we went round to the back yard to see if we could make the squirrels come down. The unlucky thing was that at that very minute the back door opened and Sarah stood there with a little, white tablecloth in her hands.

"Here, Peat!" she said. "Here you are!" And she shook some pieces of cake and some crumbs out of the little cloth. Of course, Peat went nosing right up after them. Well, as the little pieces of cake and the crumbs dropped down, I saw something else drop, too. I saw it very plainly.

"Hold on there, Peat!" I said, and I stepped up and took hold of his collar. It was really the worst thing I could have done. As you know, Peat is naturally rather contrary, and if you speak that way to him it is very apt to make him feel more so than before. To make him mind, you have to manage him just right. But I guess I didn't stop to think of that.

Anyway, I took hold of his collar to drag him back a little, and of course, when I did it, he dragged right forward.

"Stop, Peat!" I said, but Peat dragged right ahead, snuffing and nosing at the cake, and I pulled on his collar so hard that his eyes slanted back, half shut. He had made up his mind he was going to have it now, anyway.

"Look, Peaty!" I said, pointing with my other hand at something that was glistening down there in the cake crumbs. "Pick it up, quick!"

The trouble was, I spoke just too late. Peat dragged right ahead, nosing and snuffling, and his eyes shut about tight, and in about a second more he had swallowed everything there was there. I couldn't believe it, and I just dropped hold of him. But the back door opened then and mother came out. Mrs. Gaybud, the mother of Parker Gaybud, was with her, and Sarah was just behind them.

"I shook the cloth right out there," Sarah

was saying, and mother was looking round as if she felt quite disgusted.

"It was an extremely careless thing to do, Sarah," she said, "as well as a very untidy one."

"Indeed, I thought 'twould be just a bite for the dog," Sarah answered her, but mother paid no attention and Mrs. Gaybud put on her glasses and looked down very straight at Peaty and Peat.

"Felix," mother said, "have you seen anything of a ring that was probably shaken out here a few minutes ago with the cake crumbs?" I didn't make any answer.

"Yes, a ring," Mrs. Gaybud repeated in quite a stern voice, "a ruby ring."

She fixed her glasses and looked so straight at Peaty it was enough to scare anybody.

"A most unfortunate character to be present, under the circumstances," she said, and I knew then what she thought. She thought that Peaty had it.

"Will it do any good to question him?" she

said, and mother looked first at Peaty and then at me.

"Felix!" she said, and her voice sounded sterner than Mrs. Gaybud's, if anything, "tell me just what you know about this. Where is the ring that was shaken out with the cake crumbs?"

I didn't answer any more than before, but I looked at Peaty. It was the worst thing I could have done. Because when I did that, of course that settled it.

"Peaty," mother said, "where is it?"

Peaty was so scared that he turned paler than I had ever seen him yet, and that is saying a good deal, because Peaty is pale to start with.

"H—m—m," Mrs. Gaybud said, as if she had proved it now, anyway.

"Where is it, Peaty?" mother repeated, with her voice just a little kinder.

Peaty didn't make the slightest answer.

"Can we search him?" Mrs. Gaybud asked.

"Come here, Peaty," mother said. "Of

course, I'm not accusing you of having anything that doesn't belong to you, but the best way for you to prove that you haven't is to let us examine your pockets."

Peaty didn't make any answer, but he began to turn all his pockets inside out. His hands looked a little shaky, and most of his pockets were ragged, without anything in them. By the time he had finished, all that he had to show them was a half of a slate pencil and a little piece of white string folded up.

"He probably has it secluded somewhere about his person," Mrs. Gaybud said.

"Are you absolutely certain about laying it down on the table?" mother asked her.

"Perfectly sure," Mrs. Gaybud answered. "Fanny Hewitt wanted to see it. That's how it happened. Of course, it was a careless——"

"And isn't there just a bare possibility that it might have dropped on the floor?" mother asked her. "Let's look again."

"No, it didn't drop on the floor," Mrs. Gaybud answered, but while she was saying it she

turned round, and the next you knew they had both gone in the house again.

Peaty looked at me, but he didn't say anything. I didn't, either, at first, but after a while I spoke.

"Peat swallowed it," I said.

Peaty didn't say a word for quite a long time. I guess he was too scared. When he did speak it was in something like a whisper.

"Did he?" he said.

"Yes, he swallowed it with the cake," I said. There was another short pause and nobody seemed to speak.

"Are you going to tell?" I asked him after a while.

For an answer Peaty turned round and put his hand down on Peat's collar. Peat didn't seem to make the least objection, and they both walked off together. At the same minute the door opened again and mother and Mrs. Gaybud were standing there, the same as before.

"H—m—m, he's gone, you see," Mrs. Gaybud said.

Mother looked at me as if there wasn't any nonsense about it this time, either.

"Felix," she said, "I want you to go after Peaty and tell him to come back here. If you will leave this matter to me," she said, turning round to Mrs. Gaybud, "I think I can undoubtedly get your ring back again."

I was glad I didn't have to stay there any longer, anyway, and I started off on the run. Peaty was in the back yard of his own house when I found him. The ground rises up there into kind of a little hill, and he was sitting up there on the little hill with Peat beside him. They both looked quite discouraged, too. Peaty didn't say anything when he saw me coming and I was the one to speak first.

"Mother wants you to go back there," I said.

Peaty looked scared almost to death when I said it. He got up and he looked around as if he didn't know what he was going to do next. When he spoke it was all I could do to hear it.

"I guess I'll have to kill Peat first," he said.

I could see just what he meant. It was the

same as the hunter in Little Red Riding Hood. Only the hunter killed the wolf to get Little Red Riding Hood, and Peaty was going to kill Peat to get the ring. Of course, I couldn't believe that he meant it. You see, Peaty thinks everything of Peat. It sometimes seems as if he was about the only real friend he has, anyway. Because his father and mother are dead, and his aunt that he lives with is usually real mean to him, and he is apt to be quiet and a little scared acting with all the boys except me, and mother doesn't like to have me play with him very much, either, and so that is the way of it. Peat seems to be about the only one that is always just the same. So, of course, when he said, "I will have to kill Peat," why, it didn't seem as if I could believe it.

"I guess you don't mean—really kill him, do you?" I said.

Peaty just nodded his head. At the same time he took hold of Peat by the collar.

"I got to," he whispered rather hoarse. I could see then he meant it.

"Is she—waiting for me?" he whispered.

"Yes, she's waiting," I answered.

He turned round and looked down at Peat. Then he said something very low.

"Which way—would you do it?" he said.

He meant which way would you kill him, and for a minute I didn't have any idea how to answer him. But I thought of something, too.

"They say drowning is quite easy," I said; "maybe he wouldn't mind that so very much. Why don't you drown him first?" I asked him.

"I suppose after he was dead he wouldn't care what I did to him," Peaty whispered. And, of course, I knew what he was thinking. It was the same as Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf.

"No," I said, "he wouldn't care after he was dead."

Peaty looked round a little more, and then he started for the woodshed with Peat beside him. The next I knew they were both coming out again with quite a good-sized pail of water between them. They weren't either of them

saying anything, but pretty soon Peaty put down the pail of water.

"Here, Peat," he said. "Already now, in there, Peat!"

Well, when he said that, Peat looked a little surprised and then he began to kind of back off from the pail of water. Peaty picked it up and began to follow him. Peat is a small dog, and as I have said, it was quite a large pail of water. Plenty large enough for Peat to get drowned in, but it looked as if he didn't like the idea of it. Peaty began to explain it to him.

"Don't you see, it's to drown you, Peat," he said, with his voice quite encouraging, and yet not very steady either. "Come on, Peat," he said. "It don't take but a few minutes. In there, now!"

Well, Peat couldn't seem to back off fast enough. Peaty really had to get his hand down on his collar and quiet him all over again.

"It ain't anything to scare you," he ex-

plained. "It don't take but a few minutes to drown! Come on now! You ain't *scared*, are you, Peat?"

But by the time he had finished, Peat seemed to be backing all round the yard in circles. Of course, Peaty was following right after him with the pail of water, but I guess he began to see it wasn't very encouraging either. Anyway, he got his hand down on Peat's collar again and explained it for the last time.

"Now, look a here, Peat," he said, "I ain't a going to use strength on you, and I'll give you just one more chance. If you don't do it this time, why you won't get the offer again, that's all. In there now! It's your last chance, Peat!"

Well, Peat didn't take the chance. Instead of that he turned round and *walked* off and it looked as if that settled it.

Peaty looked at me quite discouraged.

"Well, I ain't going to use strength on him, anyway," he said. "And he don't seem to

want to do it himself. Can you think of—any other way?"

"Of course, you could poison him," I answered, and Peaty replied in a voice that sounded very small and light.

"There's some rat poison in the woodshed," he said.

"You better go and get it," I answered. And Peaty started for the woodshed. He came back with kind of an old looking cracker in his hand.

"It's got poison on it," he said. "I got it off the beam. Where's Peat?"

Well, by this time, Peat was sitting down there on the grass with his tail wound round his feet, as if he was thinking it over to himself. Peaty walked right straight up to him with the cracker .

"Here, Peat," he said, holding it out as if to tempt him. "It's got poison on it. Try it, Peat," he said.

Peat didn't act as if he was going to hurry about it, anyway. He just gave it a

sniff from where he was sitting and that was all.

"It's rat poison," Peaty explained. "You wouldn't mind it with the cracker and all."

Well, Peaty ought to have known that was the worst way he could have said it. Because if there's anything Peat hates, it's a rat, and the very mention of one proved just the way he felt about it. Because he got up and walked off as if he would have nothing to do with the cracker. Peaty saw his mistake, I think. It looked as if he was trying to change the subject of the rat, anyway.

"Well, it looks nice," he said, following right after Peat. "Just try it, Peat! Try it, anyway!"

But Peat only gave a kind of a snort at it, and shook his head till his collar rattled. And the next you knew there he was, backing round the yard in circles again, and Peaty was following him with the cracker held right up to his nose.

"Just try it, anyway, Peat!" he kept saying. "It ain't going to hurt you to try it, is it?"

But Peat seemed to be decided about it. I suppose it was the mention of the rat.

"He won't eat it and that's all there is to it," Peaty said after a while, and he stopped as if he really didn't see what else he could say.

"I suppose shooting is about all there is left," I said.

"I suppose so," Peaty answered.

"I'll lend you my shotgun if you want it," I said. "Could you kill him with that, do you think?"

"I don't know," Peaty answered, as if he didn't care much, either. "I guess I could if I hit him."

It looked as if I better get it for him, anyway. As I was going round the corner, though, Peaty called something. It wasn't very loud, but I heard it.

"You tell her I'm coming!" he said.

But I didn't stop to tell her anything. Instead, I got back there as quick as I could. I was afraid perhaps they would be gone, but they weren't. They were both of them sitting

up there on the little hill again looking more discouraged than ever. But when I gave Peaty the gun he got right up and came down from the little hill.

"Stay where you are Peat," he said, and Peat sat there and looked down at him as much as to say perhaps he would and perhaps he wouldn't.

"Is it loaded?" Peaty asked me.

"Yes, it's loaded," I replied, and Peaty looked at Peat as if there wasn't really anything to wait for then, and he just stepped back and aimed it.

"Hold still now, Peat!" he said.

The trouble was, the very minute he said it, Peat gave a kind of a hop as if he was feeling a little nervous.

Peaty looked as if he wasn't going to take any nonsense now, either.

"Now stop your jumping!" he said. "You've got to hold still for it, Peat, and that's all there is to it! There ain't really any other way—we *can* kill you, Peat!" he said.

Well, Peat looked completely surprised to hear him say that. And he glanced at Peaty as much as to say he would not conceal it, either.

"Stay just that way, Peat," Peaty whispered, and he aimed the gun. But Peat didn't stay that way at all. He gave about the quickest hop I ever saw a dog give. Peaty looked kind of mad.

"Well, there ain't any use trying it if you're going to do that way!" he said. "Sit down there!"

Peat glanced round as if he was not only nervous, but beginning to feel a little mad himself.

"Do you hear?" Peaty asked him.

It was getting so that Peat gave kind of a hop every time Peaty spoke, but I think it was mostly from nervousness.

"Well, it's the last chance you'll ever get," Peaty said, "this way or any other! I tell you set *down there!*"

Peat hopped, but, just to look at him, any-

body could see that he would not sit down under any circumstances.

Peaty dropped the gun.

"It ain't any use," he said.

When he said that, Peat walked down from the little hill and sat right down beside Peaty as if he didn't think it was much use, either.

"I ain't going to kill him, anyway!" Peaty said with his voice a little unsteady again. "I don't care what happens—I ain't going to kill him—anyway!"

He dragged the end of his coat sleeve across his eyes, and Peat looked up as if he didn't really know what to do about it.

"Are you going to tell mother?" I asked him.

"No!" Peaty answered.

"You want me to tell her?" I said.

"No! he answered again.

Well, the only thing for me to do was to go home alone.

"Good-by," I said.

"Good-by," he answered.

But as I went past the corner of the house I turned round and looked back again. And Peaty and Peat were sitting there side by side on the little hill as if they were really feeling more discouraged than ever before.

Mother didn't ask me any questions when she saw me. She seemed to be waiting for me to speak, myself.

"Peaty isn't coming," I said, after a while. "I guess he won't come till to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning?" mother said. "Does he realize that Mrs. Gaybud may notify the police before that time?"

But to-morrow morning came, and the police hadn't come, anyway. I know because I went over there right after breakfast. Peaty was just coming out of the yard. From the first question he asked I could tell what he was thinking about.

"Do you suppose there would be another ring just like that one—anywhere?" he said.

"Do you mean could you buy another like that?" I asked.

He nodded his head.

"We could go down to Low's and see," I said.

Low is the jeweler.

"All right," Peaty answered, real slow, as if he was thinking about it. "Let's go."

But on the way down there he only said one thing, and that was just when we turned onto Main Street.

"Do you suppose they'll send the police?" he said.

Well, it wasn't long before we were both standing there, looking in the window of Low's jewelry store. There were two cases of rings right there in front.

"Do you know what it looked like?" Peaty asked me.

"Yes, I saw it," I said, and then I guess I took a hold of Peaty's arm.

"Look!" I said. "Do you see that one with the big red stone in it, sunk deep?

Right there, the second one from the end, see it?"

Peaty saw it.

"Well, it was just like that," I said. "It was just the very same, as that!"

"How much do you suppose it would cost?" Peaty whispered. "I suppose it would cost over a dollar or so, wouldn't it?"

"I guess it would be more apt to cost over five dollars," I answered him.

Peaty looked up.

"I couldn't ever get as much as that," he said rather faint.

"Yes, you could, too," I said. "If you worked good and hard I'll bet you could get it in a week. You can carry bundles for Roades, and you can weed for Captain Brewster and you can do all kinds of things. I'll bet you could do it in a week easy," I said.

Roades is the provision store, and Captain Brewster lives at the corner of Cedar Street.

He is always hiring boys to work for him in his garden and he pays them pretty well, too.

Peaty began to look more encouraged when I talked like that.

"Couldn't we go and stop at Roades now?" he asked. "I guess I better begin right off, hadn't I?"

"I guess you had," I answered, and we both of us started right off for Roades.

But of course he was scared when he got there, and they looked at him as if they didn't want to bother at first. But then they seemed to change their minds, and told him why yes, he could carry some bundles for them right then, if he wanted to. Peaty almost smiled.

"I can't go to school," he whispered; "but I don't care. You tell your mother——"

He stopped then as if he didn't know just how to finish it.

"Tell your mother I—I'll have it for her in a week," he said.

It was time to go to school myself, then, so I couldn't tell mother until noon. She just looked at me as if she couldn't understand.

"A week?" she repeated. "Is he crazy? He

admits that he has it and demands a *week!* Well, Mrs. Gaybud is coming this afternoon and I really don't see why she should put up with that sort of thing. Where is he, anyway?"

That was the way mother talked.

"Felix, I don't want you to play with Peaty any more," she said. "I've never approved of it, you know, and this settles it. He's deceitful and dishonest. Considering his bringing up, I don't know what else you could expect, but I don't want him round here and that's the end of it."

I didn't say anything, but I thought to myself that I guessed perhaps I would see him after school, anyway. He wouldn't have any time for playing, if that was what she meant.

But it didn't seem to be so easy to find Peaty. He was running errands so fast for Roades that it was as much as anybody could do to find him at all. I waited round there for him till after five o'clock and then when he came in, it was only to get some more bundles.

"I've earned thirty-seven cents already," he said. He looked real pale and tired, but I guess he didn't have any time to think about that, either.

"I'm going to weed for Captain Brewster after supper," he said.

And the next I knew he was starting off again with bundles.

Well, that was the way Peaty kept it up all the week. Of course, he wasn't going to school, and if he had a father or mother I suppose they wouldn't have let him do it, but his aunt didn't pay much attention, and I don't really think she cared whether he went to school or not. But of course the thing of it was, how much was he earning? One evening I asked him. It was Friday.

"How much you got now, Peaty?" I said. But just then the front door opened and I heard mother's voice calling me across the grass.

Peaty turned as if he was going to run, but the door shut.

"Three dollars and ninety cents," he said real low.

I could just see his face. It seemed as if I had never seen it so white and tired looking.

"Is she going to wait for it?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said. "I guess so. I don't know."

As I have said, that was Friday. I didn't see Peaty at all over Saturday and Sunday, and Monday I only saw him for a minute. But when I waked up this morning the first thing I remembered was that it was Tuesday again. I kept thinking of it all day and wondering what would happen, anyway. It was afternoon before anybody could tell. School was out, and I was trying to find Peaty. Of course, it was just a week since the day mother had had her bridge party. That was the reason I was trying to find him. I had been waiting there outside of Roades till I was getting quite tired of it, and after a while Peaty came round the corner. He saw me and stopped. He looked something as if he had a se-

cret, and he came up nearer and then he glanced round as if to make sure nobody was listening.

"I've earned six dollars and five cents," he whispered, after a while.

I couldn't believe he would have as much as that, and yet, of course I knew how he had been working, too.

"Six dollars and five cents!" I said. "Why, you've got enough to buy the ring! Come on, Peaty, let's go down there now! I'll bet you've got enough to buy it right now!"

"Do you suppose so?" Peaty asked, with a kind of a little scared smile.

"Well, it won't take long to find out, anyway," I answered. And, without really any more words about it, we both started off for Low's jewelry store. We stopped for a minute when we got there to take a look at the window again. The ring with the big red stone sunk deep was just where it was the first time we saw it.

"Come on in," I said to Peaty.

We went in and we stopped before the big glass counter. There were rings inside it and a man with gray hair behind it, and he looked at us as much as to say what did we want. I gave a glance at Peaty, but he didn't really look as if he dared to speak, so I spoke myself.

"There's a ring out there in the window he wanted to see—he wants to buy it," I said. "It's out there in the left-hand corner," I said.

The man behind the glass counter looked as if he didn't really understand.

"You want to buy a ring?" he asked.

"Yes, it's in the front case out there. In the left-hand corner of it. He—he wants to buy it," I said.

The man behind the glass counter looked first at me and then at Peaty, and then he began to smile to himself and walked right over to the window. He came back with the case of rings in his hand.

"Aren't you getting a little reckless?" he said, with the smile still on his face, and he went behind the glass counter again and set

"'There's a ring out there in the window . . . he wants to buy it,' I said."

the rings down on it. It brought them so high up that I had to stand on my tip-toes to see them.

"It's that one," I said, reaching up and pointing to it, and he put his finger on the ring with the big red stone sunk deep and took it out. The sun was shining through the window and the ring flashed down at us so bright that Peaty seemed to catch his breath. I glanced at him and he was looking right up at it and his face seemed to be all full of little lights something like the ring. I guess he had forgotten to be scared.

"How much is it?" he asked.

"Well, let's see," the man behind the counter said, with the smile still on his face. "It's just three hundred dollars."

I thought I didn't hear it quite right.

"What did you say?" I said. "He asked how much is it."

"I know he did," the man answered, not so pleasant this time," and I said it was just three hundred dollars."

I felt kind of strange, as if it was something I didn't really understand yet. I guess I repeated it after him. And I looked at Peaty. He was staring up at the man behind the counter, but the little lights on his face had gone and it looked so small and thin and white I couldn't help wondering how it could change like that all in a second.

I spoke once more to the man behind the counter.

"Do they all cost as much as that?" I said.

"Yes, they're all expensive rings," he answered.

I gave a little pull at Peaty's coat.

The ruby ring was flashing down at us and Peaty looked round as if he was confused.

"Come on, Peaty," I said, and then he turned round and followed me. I could hear his feet behind me on the floor. When we got outside I started to say something and then I stopped. Peaty was just staring ahead of him. I didn't know what to say, so I waited a while and then he spoke himself. His words came

very slow as if he couldn't really say them, and yet he had to.

"I'll have to go—and tell her," he said.

He meant he would have to go and tell mother.

"Now?" I said. And I could just hear his answer.

"Yes—now," he said.

"Well, it isn't anything to be scared of," I said; "it's nothing to be *scared* of, Peaty."

Peaty just turned his head and gave me a little, small glance. There was something about it that looked as if he wished he could be dead.

"Come on, don't you care," I said, "come on, Peaty, I'll go with you."

But he didn't say another word till we got to the house.

"Where is she?" he whispered.

Well, she was inside, but I think she saw us. Anyway, I was just wondering what would happen when the door opened and mother stood there.

"Will you come here a moment?" she said, looking at Peaty, and he walked across the yard and then he stopped right there at the foot of the steps, below mother.

She said something to someone else behind her, in the hall, and there was Mrs. Gaybud, too. They both of them stood there, looking down at Peaty.

"Well?" mother said pretty soon, as if she was waiting for him to say something.

Peaty just looked up at her.

"Well?" mother repeated, "have you brought us something?"

Peaty looked up at her and shook his head.

Mother glanced at him with a quick look, and I guess she noticed how white he was.

Mrs. Gaybud spoke right then, herself.

"Now, we've really had enough of this," she said. "Keeping us dangling here for a week as if we were perfect fools in his hands! Why, we act like helpless idiots!"

Peaty's lips started to move, but she went right on.

"You must give me the ring before night or I shall have an officer call on you," she said.

Peaty was staring at her.

"An officer! Do you understand?" she said, "a policeman."

Mother came down the steps then.

"What's the matter with you, Peaty?" she said. "Are you sick?"

As she spoke, Peaty reached out towards her as if he would catch at something, and the next anybody knew Peaty was down there on the steps in kind of a little heap. Mother turned a little pale.

"What's the matter with you, Peaty? What's the matter with you?" she said. "Come, come—" she looked up at me. "Run and get some water, quick Felix!"

But I didn't run and get some water, either. I thought Peaty was dead. And I was so scared I guess I just began to scream.

"Look! Look what you did!" I hollered, and I could hear my own voice all strange and

high. "Look! You didn't have any business to! Oh, you didn't have any business to scare him like that!"

"Felix, stop that screaming," mother said, "and do as I tell you. Go and get some water this minute!"

"I won't go and get some water, either!" I answered her. I guess I didn't really know what I was saying. "You didn't have any business to scare him like that!" I hollered. "He didn't have the ring, anyway! He didn't ever have it!"

Mother was trying to lift up Peaty's head, but it seemed as if her voice came quick and different.

"Be careful, Felix," she said, "just what are you saying?" Mrs. Gaybud moved down one step and there was a short pause. They were both of them looking at me. It was as if they couldn't help it.

"He—didn't ever have it!" I said, and I guess I was crying now, too. "Peat swallowed it, when he wasn't even looking!"

Neither of them spoke. They just kept right on looking at me.

"And he's been working every minute there was—to buy a new one!"

I know I was crying now, but I seemed to go right on, too.

"He's been working every minute there was!" I said. "He wouldn't stop even to have his dinner!"

They didn't speak, but Mrs. Gaybud moved down the steps a little more. There was just one more thing I was trying to tell them.

"He thought he had enough to buy it, too!" I said. "But it cost three hundred dollars—and he didn't have but six!"

"Wait!" mother whispered. We turned our heads. "Wait—" she whispered again. Peaty was opening his eyes.

He looked all round, but he didn't speak. Mrs. Gaybud bent over close to mother.

"Can't you take him in the house?" she asked her, and I thought her voice sounded just a little shaky. "Can't you take him in the

house?" she repeated, and she seemed to be so nervous she took out her handkerchief and put it back again. "Oh, take him in the house!" she said, something as if she was begging mother. "There has been—I am afraid there has been some great misunderstanding about this thing!"

Peaty was looking up as if he was trying to remember, and he said something, too. It wasn't very strong, though, and Mrs. Gaybud had to bend her head.

"What was it?" she said quite gently.

"I couldn't—get enough for it," he said.

Mrs. Gaybud not only took out her handkerchief this time, but she gave it a little brush across her eyes.

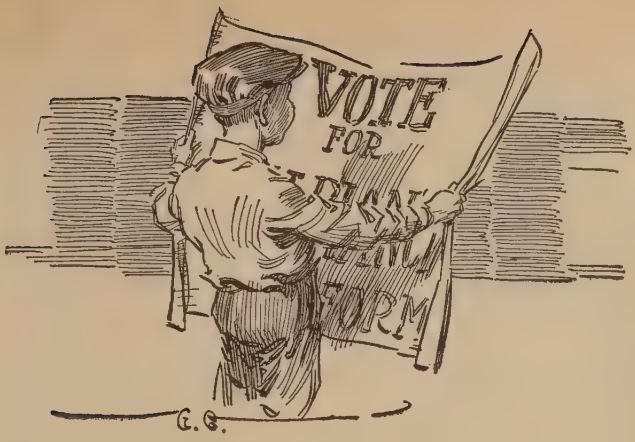
"It was quite enough, it was quite enough!" she said. "Oh, I have been very wrong about all this!"

And the next you knew she was helping mother to lift Peaty up and take him in the house. As they were going through the door I heard mother speak again.

"He'll be all right," she said; "he needs food and rest, that's all."

But from Mrs. Gaybud's face it looked as if she wished there'd never been so much fuss about the ruby ring.

I have found out another thing that may have a little something to do with it, too. I should think it might have. Especially when you think of the way she talked to Peaty, and about his being so deceitful and all. Because it was only an imitation ruby.



CHAPTER V

WHEN FATHER RAN FOR MAYOR

A GOOD deal has happened since I wrote last—especially to father. I have to go back a little to make you understand. I remember we were sitting at the dinner table that evening, just mother and I, because Luly had gone to bed, when father came in and sat down about as usual. The first thing he did was to take up his glass of water and drink a little and the next thing he did was to look at mother as if he had some-

thing to say. Then he seemed to change his mind about it, as if perhaps it wasn't so very important either. Anyway, when he did speak, it sounded as if it wasn't anything really worth mentioning, but he supposed he might as well mention it, for all that.

"Well," he said, "they're still at me on this mayor business."

Mother looked at him as if she had heard about that before.

"They won't let it alone," he said.

"I know," she replied. "But you aren't really going to consider it, are you? Why, you wouldn't consider it, would you, Jo?"

Father seemed to join right in with her.

"No, I don't care a rap about it," he said. "And I wish they'd let me alone, but they won't. I met Tom Lattimer in the Registry of Deeds this morning and he asked me if I'd had a letter from the city committee. I hadn't," father said, "but I got it an hour later."

"What did they want?" mother asked him.

"They wanted me to be on hand for their meeting this evening. If I'm there I suppose they think they'll get me right down to business."

"Are you going?" she asked.

"Oh I don't know," he replied. "I may stroll in, in the course of the evening. I don't care a rap about being Mayor, and I sha'n't turn my hand over to do anything about it, but if it comes right in my way I suppose I may drop into the meeting."

"If you stayed away, wouldn't that put an end to it?"

"I suppose it would," father said. "Yes, they only want me there in case I'll consider it. Well, I may not go down after all. Something will probably turn up to prevent it, anyway."

He began looking at the evening paper then, so mother and I got talking about the little lost kitten that came that afternoon. Mother said she didn't see how we could possibly have another cat, and then just as we

were getting up from the table father spoke again.

"They want me to run as the Reform Candidate," he said.

Mother laughed then.

"Reform Candidate!" she repeated. "I don't know as I blame you for not wanting to undertake that responsibility."

"There's plenty of need for reform, "father replied, and mother and I went out into the hall.

But father was still standing there in the dining-room, with his paper, when mother went in a little later and told him that Mrs. Tipton wanted to see him in the library. Father looked up as much as to ask who was Mrs. Tipton, but he started for the library, and not only that, but he looked a little discouraged just as soon as he got there. The trouble was he knew just exactly who Mrs. Tipton was. She was somebody who was always having things to worry about, and the thing that seemed to worry her the most of

all was getting her husband's life insured.

That was what always seemed to make father a little mad. He said if her husband wanted his life insured he should think he was the one to tend to it.

But Mrs. Tipton would always tell him that her husband wasn't the kind to plan ahead like that. She said he couldn't seem to take any interest in paying out money that he wouldn't get back till he was dead.

My father is in the insurance business and so of course he knows that men usually get their lives insured so as to have their wives get paid if they are dead. But Mr. Tipton couldn't ever seem to take any interest in that, either. So Mrs. Tipton would keep coming to father because he is in the insurance business. She said she wanted to have father use his influence and persuade Mr. Tipton it was the only decent thing to do.

Well, when father went into the library, there was Mrs. Tipton sitting there with her pocket handkerchief. I guess she was really

crying a little too, and when father asked her what was the trouble, she said that Mr. Tipton's business affairs were in worse condition than she had ever known them yet, and not only that, but he was sick and she was worried almost beyond endurance because she said he might die to-morrow and he hadn't got his life insured yet. She wanted father to use his influence and really make him see it was the only decent thing to do.

Well, father told her it was a little late, under the conditions, and he doubted if they could find a company that would insure him if he was going to die to-morrow.

Mrs. Tipton stopped crying then and said of course she didn't mean that. He wasn't sick enough but what he would recover, but what she meant was, his business affairs were in such poor shape, and supposing he should recover and then die. Then where would she be, she said, because he couldn't seem to get any of his bills paid up, not even little ones like the water rates or getting his trousers

pressed, and yet he would not do the least thing about getting his life insured.

Father kind of interrupted then and told her of course it would take a little money even to get his life insured.

She answered him right off though and said well, he had a little, she was sure he had a little because he was talking about buying an automobile so he must have. The idea of owning an automobile, she said, and not having your life insured! She said it sometimes seemed as if he wasn't quite right.

Father glanced at his watch then and said well, if he wasn't right, that would put an end to it and he couldn't get his life insured anyway.

"Oh, he's right enough," Mrs. Tipton answered him, "when it comes to anything he really wants to do. But I have almost come to the conclusion," she said, "that he actually does not want to get his life insured."

And then she began all over again about it being the only decent thing to do. Father

glanced off at the clock then, and told her if he got an opportunity he would use his influence with Mr. Tipton, and then she started in again telling him she wished he would. It looked as if she was going to stay most all the evening, but I guess it wasn't much more than an hour either when she got up to go. Father looked pretty provoked when he shut the front door after her.

"I never had anything of the least importance to do yet," he said, "that I wasn't interrupted by that gabbler.

"She's a tiresome mortal, there's no doubt of that," mother replied, and father crossed the hall to the coat closet that was on the other side.

"It's raining, isn't it?" he said, and he went into the coat closet as if he thought perhaps his umbrella was in there.

"Raining?" mother said, "why, I don't think so," and she opened the front door as she spoke, and looked out. Well, just as she opened the door there came a big strong gust

of wind into the hall, and the coat closet slammed shut again.

Of course father was in there looking for his umbrella, but the only thing that made it look a little unlucky for a minute, was the knob of the door, and that was on account of the man they call the locksmith. You see he had been working on locks and doorknobs most all the afternoon, and the trouble was he didn't quite finish. Mother seemed to understand all about it though. Anyway, just as soon as the door shut with father in there, she spoke.

"Why, Jo!" she said, "you haven't gone to work and shut that door have you!"

Father didn't make any reply at first. He seemed to be kind of fumbling on the other side. Pretty soon he answered though.

"What's the matter with this door?" he said. "Open the door, Louise. What's the matter with it, anyway?"

"Oh, dear," mother said. "Oh dear, Jo," she said, going right up close and speaking

quite loud. "You ought not to have let it shut. The locksmith has taken the knobs off. Now how in the world are you going to get out?"

"Knobs off?" father repeated, only of course his voice sounded rather muffled from the other side. "Knobs off, did you say? Well, why didn't you tell me so?"

Mother didn't answer him. I guess she couldn't think of just the right thing to say. So father went on speaking.

"Well, get something to open it with, Louise," he said, "and please hurry, too. Get a knife or something like that," he said. "You can work the latch back easily enough. I could, myself, if I had anything to do it with. Go ahead Louise, I can't spend my time in this hole," he said.

I took out my jackknife and mother got right down on her knees.

"Here Felix," she said, "here, let me see." And she began prying at the latch with my jackknife. Her forehead kind of wrinkled up

and her underlip got drawn in real tight, so she didn't speak, but just gave all her attention to prying at the latch.

"Well, what's the matter?" father said pretty soon from the other side of the door. "Can't you do it?"

Mother answered him with little stops between her words as if she really couldn't take the time for it.

"I can't seem to get any purchase on it," she said.

And then she went working at it again, harder than ever.

Father kept still for a minute or so longer, as if he would give her a little more chance, and then he spoke again.

"Well, give me something through the keyhole to work with," he said. "I really can't waste my time like this. Give me a knitting needle, anything that you can get through the keyhole," he said. "I could open it in four seconds if I was out there."

"Take one of my hatpins," mother answered.

"Right there on the lower shelf. You know where my hats are, Jo."

"Your hats?" father replied. "It's darker than Egypt in here. I don't know where your hats are."

"Well, I'm sure I could find the hat shelf in less than four seconds if I was in there," mother answered him. "Don't be so helpless, Jo."

"Helpless!" father replied. "I should think so! Helpless!" he said again, and just then I guess he pricked his finger on a hatpin. "Helpless!" he kind of hollered, and then he began rattling away at the latch with the hatpin, with the worst clatter you ever heard.

But it wouldn't come open any better than before.

"Of course I can't do anything with a hatpin!" he said. "That's no kind of a tool, and I can't keep up this nonsense any longer either! I've got an engagement and I'm late now!"

Well, it sounded then as if he was trying to

push the door open with his strength. But it is a very heavy one, and of course there wasn't any knob to get a purchase on, and anyway he couldn't do it, so he stopped trying and then he spoke again. I guess he thought there wasn't any use getting mad about it either.

"Come Louise, he said. Now just use a little knack and common-sense and you can get that door open in half a minute. Turn the point of the knife *back,* and get it under the edge of the latch."

Mother was down on her knees again with her forehead all wrinkled up and her underlip drawn in. I guess she had been working about three minutes at it when father spoke once more.

"Are you making any headway?" he asked.

"Not any that I can see," she replied.

In about another minute father spoke again.

"Well use something else," he said. "For pity's sake try something else then!"

"I am," mother answered. "I'm using the scissors."

He waited as much as a minute then to give her a chance with the scissors, I suppose.

"Are you making any headway?" he asked then.

"Not any that I can see," mother answered.

There was quite a pause.

"Do you see any likelihood of my ever getting out of here?" father asked after a while.

"Not much," mother answered, as if she was getting a little bit discouraged, and from the sound of father's voice when he replied, I guess he was discouraged, too.

"Well, this is a pretty predicament!" he said.

He didn't really seem to know what he was going to say next. But finally he decided.

"I'm going to break the door open," he said. "Move back, Louise, I'm going to break it open."

"Wait!" mother answered. "Wait just a minute!" And then all of a sudden the latch slipped back and the door came open.

"'Do you see any likelihood of my ever getting out of here?' father asked."

Father stood there in the closet for a minute, looking too surprised to really speak of it right off, and then he stepped out into the hall and glanced up at the clock. Mother was still down on her knees but he didn't seem to notice.

"I'm late for that meeting," he said, and he snatched a hat out of the closet and started for the door. It happened to be his high silk one. He had forgotten that it was raining or else he was so glad to really get started that he didn't care. Anyway he went out the door and down the street so fast that I couldn't help thinking of some of the things he said at dinner. It really looked as if he must have changed his mind since then, because he said he didn't care a rap about being Mayor, but he supposed he might stroll into the meeting, if it happened to be right in his way. And yet when I looked out of the window he was jumping onto a moving car in the rain, with his high silk hat on, and going downtown with only one foot on the running board.

He surely must have changed his mind.

The next morning we found out that he had, for sure.

"Well," he said, "I'm in for it."

"What do you mean?" mother said. "Have you decided you want to be Mayor after all?"

"I've decided to make the run," he said. "I guess I'm sure of the nomination. But it will be a close fight for the election."

Well, of course that meant that father was going to try to get elected if he could, but that he had to get the nomination first. It meant we had to wait quite a while for him to get the nomination, too. And we did. But it came out the way he thought it would, and father got it. I think it was the tenth day of October.

"The campaign is on!" he said the next morning, and if you had seen the papers you would have thought something was the matter. They were all about father and Mayor Martin. He was the one who was running against father. It was queer too but their first names

were alike, and they weren't the slightest relation, either.

Well, the thing of it is, just as soon as you start out to get elected for Mayor they begin having all kinds of meetings for you, and you have to make speeches and go hurrying round in an automobile so fast that you sometimes have to stop and pay, and then go hurrying on again, faster than ever, to make up. Father had to do that way, anyway, and it seemed sometimes as if they kept him going in the automobile most all night. And every time he came in, in the daytime, he was in such a hurry to go out again that mother would sometimes look almost out of patience and say she would be glad when this siege was over.

She would read the papers at breakfast time and father would too, and most of them would say that father was making a wonderful run, and it was going to be a very close election, but with the chances probably favoring Mayor Martin.

Of course that would make father feel

busier than before, and he would start off again in the worst hurry yet, for a lot more meetings. And they called it the Citizens' Movement and father the Reform Candidate, and all like that.

Well, one morning just as he was starting off, he looked at his watch and then he turned round and looked at mother.

"I sha'n't be here to lunch," he said. "Big noon meeting in Washington Temple. The Governor's going to be there. Great meeting, probably."

That was the way he talked now, as if he didn't have time for all the words, but he stood there with one hand on the door for a minute, and I spoke myself.

"Can't I go to the meeting in Washington Temple?" I asked him.

Father looked at me very quick.

"Why no, of course you can't," he said, and he opened the door and went right out.

"Oh, dear," mother said, "this excitement and suspense are enough to wear anybody out.

Thank fortune there aren't many more days of it."

What she meant was, there were really only four more days till Tuesday. Because it was Friday now, and Tuesday was the day they voted and had the election.

Well, I went to school the same as usual, but all the morning I couldn't seem to think of anything at all but the big meeting in Washington Temple, with the Governor there, and everybody listening to what he said about father, and father making a speech himself—till it almost seemed as if I couldn't stand it, not to be there.

I am not sure how it would have come out though, if it hadn't been for going home from school with Benny Hodgman and Tracy Keene. They live in quite a poor part of the city, I guess. Anyway, they always look as if they were quite poor, but they always seem to know about everything that is going on on the street, and free meetings and things like that.

Well, as we came along past Washington

Temple there were people hurrying round and running in, and automobiles driving up and stopping, and people crowding round the door, and what do you suppose, just as we were standing there, there came along an automobile that seemed to be in the worst hurry of any of them, and father and some other men hopped out of it and went right up the steps and into the hall.

The crowd round the door began to cheer then and Benny and Tracy seemed to understand all about it.

"There goes your father, Felix," Benny said. "He thinks he's going to be elected Mayor, but he ain't."

"You bet he ain't," Tracy said. "Come on in!" he said. And he began going right up the steps.

Well, there didn't anybody tell him he couldn't, so Benny went right along after him and I went right along after Benny.

The seats were all filled up, balconies and all, when we got in, but there were a lot of

men standing there by the door and we just stopped and stood there too. There were a good many ladies in the balconies and a band was playing and it was great, I tell you. I couldn't help thinking for a minute what father said when I asked him if I could come. And I couldn't help thinking, what would mother say, too, but just then I forgot most everything like that, because a door on one side of the platform opened, and a lot of men began coming onto the platform in a long line. And I just wish you could have seen the way all those people acted then. All of a sudden they jumped right out of their seats and began to cheer and clap and cheer and jump round till you never heard such a racket in your life.

"There's the Governor!" I heard a man say just behind me. "The old boy's taking a hand, himself." And then everybody seemed to rise right up on their toes and wave their hats and make so much noise that he had to bow and bow and keep on bowing while they seemed to

keep on getting louder, till the last man came in and it was father, on the very end of the line.

Well, all there is, I wish you could have heard it then. I never heard anything like it. They began to stamp and made a thousand times more noise than they ever did before, and the ladies began to wave their handkerchiefs from the balconies, and one of them got so excited she waved her arms and most tumbled over the edge. Of course the ones that saw her couldn't help laughing, and the man next me said, "Look at the suffragette," and then they stamped and made a worse noise than before, and from the way Benny and Tracy joined in it looked as if they had changed their minds since they came, and I got so excited I guess I made as much noise as any of them.

It seemed like forever before it quieted down, too, so that they could begin to speak, and then they introduced the Governor. It was a great honor, they said to have him come back to his home town and lend his voice in

this fight for decent government, and then of course the noise began all over again, and when he got through he had to begin to bow again and keep on bowing till he must have been pretty tired.

Then they had the next speaker, and then they had the next one. And it was queer but both of them spoke of one special thing about father. They said perhaps it was the only thing they could find fault with, in him, and that was his modesty. I didn't know what they meant, right off at first, but after a while I decided it meant he was kind of bashful. That was the way they talked, anyway, and as if he didn't really like to be running for Mayor very much, but was doing it just for an accommodation.

Perhaps that was one reason why they made the worst noise yet when father got up to speak. To encourage him. It made him look quite encouraged anyway, and he smiled and bowed perhaps even more than the Governor, and the Governor was clapping, too, and they

acted as if they were about crazy anyway, and then, the next you knew, father was speaking.

I can't remember all he said, but when he got a good start I remember he said that this was a true citizens' awakening, and there was good reason for it. He said that the Proud Name of our City had been dishonored until our Municipal Affairs had become a Target for Ridicule and Derision. And then he went right on to speak about the Present Mayor, as he called him. I can't tell you just what it was either, but it sounded as if he had been the worst Mayor they had ever had yet, but if they would give him, their Reform Candidate a chance and stand by him, on Tuesday next, he would do everything he could and use every power that in him lay to be the best one they had ever had yet.

They gave him a great hurrahing and cheering then, partly to encourage him again, I suppose, for being so modest and bashful, and he sat down and they gave three cheers for

the next Mayor, and then everybody went hurrying out.

Well, when I got home I didn't really know whether to speak of where I had been or not. First I thought I would, and then I thought I wouldn't. I decided I would wait a while before I spoke of it, anyway, and the next day was Saturday and the next day was Sunday and the next day was Monday, and I went to school again. It was the day before the election, and the boys were all talking about it when they saw me. Some of them said father wouldn't be elected and some of them said he would. Tracy said he'd bet five dollars he wouldn't, and I asked him what made him holler so loud for him last Friday noon then.

He said that wasn't anything to the way he would do at one of Martin's rallies. He said I ought to be at one of Martin's, if I wanted to really hear something. He said father's weren't anything compared to one of Martin's.

Well, it seemed when I went home that day

as if I wouldn't ever want to go to school again, if father wasn't elected. Of course they would begin to vote the next morning. It seemed before the day was over, as if the next morning would never come, too. But of course it did, and it was quite bright and sunny, and we sat down at the breakfast table about as usual.

Father didn't talk very much, but he answered very quick and pleasant when anybody spoke to him and mother spoke quite a little. She told him it wasn't any use worrying, anyway, and he said he was sure he wasn't worrying, in the very least, and pretty soon he got up to go. He said he was going to vote first and then he was going downtown to his headquarters.

"I shall be *thankful* when this day is over," mother said, when father had gone out and down the street. I felt something the same way myself. But they wouldn't begin to count the votes till four o'clock.

Well, the worst of it was, all day long I

seemed to keep thinking of that one thing they said they had to find fault with in father. You see I would keep wondering and wondering if it would really keep him from being elected. I looked it up in the dictionary to make sure exactly what it meant, and it said, "Modesty, a lowly temper." And then something about the tendency to underrate oneself. It looked as if it had something to do with eating, and as if perhaps they thought he didn't eat enough. But I didn't believe that would keep him from being elected either, because he eats a plenty. I decided it was what I thought it was in the beginning. About the same as bashful. And the thing that worried me, was he modest and bashful *enough* so that he couldn't be elected Mayor on account of it?

It got to be four o'clock though. I heard it strike just as Sarah and Luly came in from a little walk and went upstairs together. That wasn't all either; it got to be five. Then pretty soon the telephone began to ring. Mother answered it, but that was only just the beginning

of it. I guess father had told them to do it. Anyway, it would keep ringing and ringing and mother would go and they would tell her it was so close they couldn't tell yet, and she looked as if she was getting nervous. Then it didn't ring again for a long time and she couldn't get anybody on it at all and there seemed to be a great noise and commotion going on, out on the street. She opened a window and just then the telephone began to ring and ring and ring. But by the time mother got there, there was so much noise and commotion just outside, that she couldn't even hear.

"Wait, wait!" she said, putting down the receiver. "Listen! What's that they're saying out there! Listen! Listen! Your—your father's elected Felix. Your father's—elected!"

She sat right down as if it made her feel queer.

But they kept cheering, out there, and calling out all kinds of things, and that wasn't all either. There was a band! I don't know

whether they really thought father was in the house or not, but the band kept on playing and they kept on cheering and calling for him and mother was getting more nervous all the time.

"What are we going to do?" she said, pretty soon. "I can't go out and face that mob. Felix!" And she turned round to me very quick. "Can't you go? Can't you just step out there on the porch and thank them, and say your father isn't here? Can't you? Be a man, Felix! Go out and tell them that!"

That was what mother said, and my throat got kind of tight and queer feeling, but I started for the door. Then I just opened it and went right out. I shut it behind me. And the big crowd of men out there saw me standing there all alone by myself. For a minute they just looked at me, as much as to ask what I was going to do. And then, the next I knew they all of them began to cheer. My face felt awfully hot, but I stood there anyway, and all of a sudden I felt so brave I didn't really know

who I was. And I felt the wind blowing on my face and up through my hair, as if to encourage me. And I looked at them and they looked back at me, as if they were waiting, but so still you would hardly believe it.

"My father isn't here," I said real loud and clear, but my voice trembled just a little bit, too. I wasn't really scared though.

"He hasn't come home yet," I said. "But mother wants to have me thank you for coming up like this, and father would thank you for such a nice surprise, too, but you see he can't, and so I came out myself to—thank you."

I stumbled a little like that, I think, on the last words, and they were very still again, for a minute, as if perhaps they were waiting for me to say some more. Then you ought to have heard them cheer! I turned right round and went into the house as fast as I could, and mother put her arms round me with some tears coming in her eyes at the same time.

"My brave little boy!" she said, with her

arms getting real tight. "My brave little boy!"

And they were cheering outside, louder than ever.

Well, of course that was a part of it, and I thought you would like to hear it. And yet the principal thing was—father was elected for Mayor, and nobody could change it.

That wasn't all either. Benny and Tracy and the others treated me to candy and offered me marbles and all kinds of things when I went to school this morning.

And there is just one more thing I would like to speak of, too. And this is it. I don't really think father is so modest and bashful as they think. Because when he came home last night, after it was all over, he looked round at us, all smiling, as if he felt very nice and ready for anything.

"Well," he said, "I didn't think the enthusiasm at those meetings was going for nothing! It's been a great campaign!"

Mother went over there where he was stand-

ing, but she didn't speak right off, so I spoke myself. I knew I wouldn't have a better chance.

"I went to that meeting in Washington Temple, father," I said. "I just stopped in there, coming home from school."

"Did you?" father said, smiling more than ever and giving me quite a brisk slap on the back at the same time. "It was a great meeting, wasn't it, son?"

"Yes," I said, a little surprised at the way he took it, and then father looked at mother.

"Oh, there's nothing like it," he said. "I'm going to run for Governor next!"

Mother put her hand up on his shoulder.

"I may be President before I die. Who knows," he said. "I may be President!"

That was the thing I wanted to speak about. Because I don't think father is really modest and bashful enough to do him any hurt at all.

CHAPTER VI

DAVID DODD AND I

IT seemed as if father hadn't any more than got elected for Mayor before David Dodd came. David Dodd is my cousin. He is only five years old, and I never really knew him much until he came with his mother to make us that visit. His mother is my mother's sister and my aunt. It was almost a month ago that they made us that visit and they got here the tenth of November. I remember, because it was my birthday and they brought presents. David's was a book about foliage. It must have been his mother that chose it. I don't think it was anything he

would have picked out himself. You will see what I mean when you know a little more about David.

It was fine that day they came. The leaves were most all off the trees and lying round in different colors on the ground, and it was so cold in the morning that mother had me put on my thick, dark blue sailor.

The sun was shining very bright though, when I started for school. It was the kind that made the colors on the leaves look brighter. It made you feel like running all the way, too. Not only that, but it made you hungry before school even began. By the time it was over you felt almost starved. I felt that way, anyhow, and I started for home in a hurry.

When I got there they were just sitting down to dinner. We have been having dinner in the middle of the day all summer, and we haven't changed back yet. Well, as I said, they were just sitting down to dinner and Aunt Emma and David were there.

Of course Aunt Emma got up and began

telling how glad she was to see me and how I'd grown, and all that. David didn't look so glad about it as she did. He sat there at the table, right next to her, as if he felt pretty cross and then all of a sudden he looked up at her and said he wanted some dinner.

Of course that sounded a little strange, because nobody had begun to eat yet, and David was only five anyway, so you would think he would have waited without saying much. But he never seemed to think of such a thing.

"I'm hungry," he said, wriggling round in his seat and looking up at his mother. "I want some dinner."

I suppose it was the air that made him hungry, and his mother began tending to him right off.

"Sh—sh David," she said, as if she was trying to make him sound a little more polite. "Why, here's your soup all ready for you. What nice soup it is, too!" she said.

"I don't want any soup," David answered her, wriggling round some more, and it looked

as if he had forgotten about anybody being there but his mother. Anyway he seemed to be getting pretty mad about it. "I want some meat," he said. "I don't want any soup."

Well, of course it wasn't time for meat yet, and it seemed kind of a funny way for company to act, even if the air did make him hungry. I guess his mother thought so, too.

"Sh—sh, now be a good boy, David. See how nicely Felix is eating his soup," she said. "That's what makes him so nice and tall. Wouldn't you like to be nice and tall like Felix?"

David gave me a look as much as to say no, he'd rather be no size at all than look like me, and went on saying he wanted some meat, while his mother went on saying "sh—sh," and asking him to be more quiet.

Mother looked at him as if she didn't think he was acting very nice.

"The meat hasn't come in yet, David," she said. "You will have to *wait* till it *comes*."

David kind of looked at her from under his

eyebrows, as if he didn't see what she had to do with it, but I guess it was quite an idea to him too, that about waiting till it came.

"You still believe in moral suasion, don't you, Emma?" mother said, as if she was trying to sound quite polite.

"Oh, I'm often very impatient with him," Aunt Emma answered. "But of course I've no right to be. I'm always sorry for it afterwards."

I think she meant by that, that unless she let him act that way about the meat, why she wouldn't be patient enough, but I am not quite sure.

"I shouldn't call it a matter of patience," mother said. "I should call it a matter of obedience." And David picked up his knife then and looked at his mother crosser than ever, and said he wanted some potato.

Well, I guess she was glad of the change, anyway. But mother spoke again.

"The potato hasn't come in, David," she said. "You will have to *wait* till it *comes*."

David didn't look any pleasanter at that, but he began to wave his knife round at his mother and said he wanted some macaroni.

It looked now as if he had got started changing, and perhaps he might keep right on. But his mother tried to explain it.

"He's so fond of macaroni," she said. "It's really his favorite dish!"

"That's unfortunate," mother answered, "since we aren't going to have any."

David looked at his mother when she said that, and he seemed to understand it, too. Anyway he looked right at his mother, and his face got all puckered up at the same time.

"I want some macaroni!" he said, and the next you knew he began to cry, with the tears running down his cheeks.

"There, there," his mother answered, trying to comfort him at the same time. "It was a mistake to speak of macaroni! It is his favorite of favorites!"

She seemed to have forgotten that it was David that spoke of it first, himself, but just

at that very minute the door opened and father walked in. He had to be a little late, but he had come home to dinner all the same.

Of course he shook hands right off with Aunt Emma, and said he was glad to see her, and then he gave David's head kind of a little shake between his fingers.

"Well, what's the matter here?" he said very pleasant.

David was quite red in the face by this time, and Aunt Emma tried to explain it to father.

"We stumbled upon an unfortunate subject," she said. "You see——"

But David interrupted right then, himself.

"I want some macaroni!" he cried, with the tears rolling down his cheeks, and into his mouth too. Father looked as if he didn't exactly understand it yet.

"Why, you see he spoke of wanting some macaroni," mother began, as if she would explain it anyway, "and I let fall the *unfortunate* remark that we had no macaroni for dinner!"

It seemed to make David madder than ever to hear mother explaining it to father, and he got real purple in the face then.

"I want some macaroni!" he hollered, and the tears were running down so fast into his mouth that it looked as if somebody'd be obliged to do something or other about it, anyway.

"Macaroni?" father said. I never knew father so slow to understand anything. I guess it was because he came in so sudden and wasn't really expecting anything of the kind. "Macaroni?" he said, "what's the matter? He wants some macaroni? Well, can't he have some?"

"Why, no, I tell you he can't," mother answered, "for the simple reason that we haven't any!"

And Aunt Emma joined right in, too.

"It was an unfortunate subject," she explained again. "You see he is very *very* fond of macaroni."

"Well, we have it quite often," father an-

swered. "Haven't you got any, Louise?" he asked.

"No, *I tell you I haven't!*" mother answered. And David got kind of black in the face then.

"I want some macaroni!" he hollered, and he made such a noise and choked so, that father looked up as if they'd have to do something.

"Well, make him some!" he said. "For heaven's sake, make him some!"

"Why I *can't* make him any, Jo," mother replied. "It would take twenty minutes at least, just to boil it. It's out of the question making any macaroni now!"

"And he doesn't like it just boiled," Aunt Emma explained real quick, but as if she was getting a little discouraged, too. "It has to be browned on top. He doesn't like it unless it is browned on top."

David looked as if he had made up his mind to have it now, anyway, browned on top and all—because he picked up his knife and began banging on the table and making more noise than ever, till mother spoke again.

"You'll really have to take him away from the table Emma," she said. "There isn't any macaroni, and furthermore there isn't going to *be* any."

Mother looked as if that was all she had to say.

"I'm afraid I shall," Aunt Emma replied, as if she was getting entirely discouraged now, and she got up and took him in her arms. He screamed and kicked so that father got up too, to help her.

"No Jo, thank you," she said. "I can manage him best myself."

I don't think that was just what she meant, but anyway she got him upstairs, and then we could hear him up there, through the doors and floor, and not only that, but we could hear that he was still crying for macaroni.

Father looked at mother as if he was most too disgusted to speak.

"What ever started such a rumpus, anyway?" he said.

Mother looked at father as if she *was* too disgusted to speak.

"Is that the way she brings him up?" father asked, "to sit up and bellow for what he wants?"

"He usually gets it without," mother answered. "This is only what happens when he *can't* get it."

"Do you mean to say that Emma lets him run things to suit himself?" father asked her.

"I'm afraid she does," mother answered.

Father went on eating his dinner.

"Well, I guess he'll have to make a few changes while he's here," he said.

"Oh for mercy's sake Jo, don't make any trouble," mother answered. "They're our guests, and we certainly want them to have a good time."

I couldn't make out by the looks of father, whether he was going to make any trouble or not. But just as he was starting back to his office, Aunt Emma came downstairs.

"Well, how's the young czar feeling now?" he asked, with something like a smile.

"Oh, he's tired himself out and gone to sleep," Aunt Emma replied.

Well, David acted kind of sleepy all the rest of the day. Nobody really had any more trouble with him until the next morning, and then of course it was at the breakfast table.

It began this time with the cream pitcher, when Sarah was passing it to him for his porridge. She was really going to pour it for him, herself, but David didn't seem to like that very much either, and started taking it away from her.

"He wants to pour it himself," his mother said. "I think he can manage it all right."

And David began to pour it. He kept on till it slopped over the edge of his dish and then his mother stopped him. Sarah had given it to him before anybody else, to save trouble I think, but it didn't work so very well either. Because when he was through with his own, he

thought he would pour his mother's for her. She seemed to think perhaps she'd have to let him too, till it began to slop over the edge and then she stopped him again. He seemed to think then, he'd have to pour mother's, and he reached over as if he was really going to. But mother took it right out of his hands.

"No I thank you," she said. "I don't care for any assistance at all."

David was a little surprised to have her take it away so sudden, and he looked up at Aunt Emma and his face puckered up, something the way it did about the macaroni.

"Come now, eat your porridge, David," she said, and she fed him a spoonful of it, and David's face didn't look any better.

"I don't like it," he said. "It's sour."

"The cream sour?" mother said, and she took a spoonful of hers.

"Why no, it's not sour, either," she said. "It's perfectly sweet."

David looked at her and began squirming round in his chair.

"It is sour, so," he kind of mumbled, and father took some of his then.

"No, it's not either," he said quite loud and clear. "That's a mistake of yours, David. It's not sour in the least."

Then he turned round and looked at me very stern.

"Felix, stop dawdling and go to eating at once," he said.

I didn't see what he meant by that, because I was eating along just as fast as I could, anyway.

"And sit up straight in your chair," mother said. "I can't bear to see a child sit shiftlessly at the table! Sit up, Felix!"

Well, I sat up as straight as I could, but David was slipping down so far that it looked as if he would be out of sight entirely next.

"Come, eat your porridge, David," Aunt Emma said, and she tried to give him a boost at the same time. But he seemed to slip down farther than ever.

"I don't want any; it's sour," David said, and father looked at him very quick.

"I just said that it was *not* sour," he said. "What do you mean by this contradiction, sir? I said it was *not* sour. Don't you know it's the grossest impertinence to contradict your elders?"

David was so far down under the table by this time, that about all you could see was one eye, and that one was right on father. It looked as if it had never met anybody just like father, either.

"I aren't hungry," he said, squirming round a little more, under the table.

"Well that's a different matter," father replied. "But neither this cream nor porridge are sour. Do you understand that now, sir?"

I don't know why father kept calling him sir, but David looked as if perhaps he didn't feel quite so smart as before. Anyway, he didn't make any answer to that, and father looked at me again.

"Felix, finish that up immediately," he said.

"What are you thinking of, taking so much time for it?"

I didn't know what he meant then, anyway, because I was all through and there wasn't a speck left, either. I started to tell him so, but he didn't give me any chance.

"Now that's enough," he said, sterner than before, if anything. "Just eat your porridge!"

Well, there wasn't any sense in it, because as I said before, it was all gone and there wasn't any more to eat. I guess I tried to tell him so again.

"Eat!" father answered, and I took my spoon and tried to dig a piece out of the bottom of my bowl.

David was out of sight under the table now, but he was quiet, too, and I guess it was a pretty good place for him. His mother wasn't trying to get him out, anyway. Father was still looking at me though, and I guess I was scraping the picture off the bottom of my bowl.

"For mercy's sake, Felix, stop that awful

noise!" mother said. "Eat quietly! Why, you set my nerves on edge!"

It didn't look as if I could suit them, anyway. It seemed strange when you thought of it, too. There was David's mother letting him go down under the table, when he hadn't even begun his porridge, and there were my father and mother trying to make me eat mine, when I had already finished it. It made me think they didn't any of them show so very much sense.

Well, by the time we were all through breakfast, David had got out from under the table again, but he hadn't had much to eat, either, and his mother said she was worried about him because his appetite was so unsatisfactory.

I guess she worried about all day. She needn't have. By supper-time David was more lively than anyone had ever seen him yet.

Father is apt to go out again in the evening, but it just happened that this time he stayed at home. We were all in the library,

and it was so cool, there was a fire in the fireplace. It was really time for David to go to bed, but he hadn't gone, either. Aunt Emma was reading, but she had to stop quite often, too, to speak to him.

"Don't David," she would say. "Now please don't turn the books upside down. Aunt Louise won't like it."

And then David would go right on turning them upside down till she spoke again.

"Now David, turn them back, that's a good boy. Turn them up right again, David, that's a good boy." But by that time David was over by the desk.

"Oh, David please don't touch the letters in that desk!" Aunt Emma said. "Nobody likes to have their letters disturbed. Come, let's see if we can't find something nice to read together. See how quietly Felix is reading to himself! Now let's find something to read, too."

I was studying my reading lesson for the next day, and I suppose that was a good rea-

son for not making a great noise about it, but David gave me a look as much as to say he didn't see anything so very wonderful about it, and then he reached out for the book Aunt Emma had just been reading, herself. I guess he liked the cover of it.

"I want to read that," he said.

"Oh, no," Aunt Emma answered. "That isn't what you want to read. You wouldn't understand it, David. Now, wait just a minute till I find you something that you really like."

"I want to read *that*," David said, pulling at the book in Aunt Emma's hands.

"But you wouldn't understand it, David! Now listen, it's all about *Re-in-car-na-tion*. Don't you see—you wouldn't have the least idea what it all meant. Why, it's all I can do to understand it myself."

David took hold of the book when she said that, as if he was going to read it now, anyway. And father turned round a little from where he was sitting, reading his paper.

"It means if you don't behave yourself pretty well, you'll be a cat or a bumble-bee or a potato-bug or something like that, next you know."

"Why, it doesn't mean anything of the kind, Jo," Aunt Emma replied. "If you understood the theory, you'd know that wasn't so!"

David was looking at father and Aunt Emma spoke again very quickly.

"That isn't so, David," she said. "There is not the slightest danger of your ever being a cat or a potato-bug either. You couldn't be if you wanted to."

David seemed to get quite mad when she said that, and he gave another pull at the book.

"I could so," he said. "I could be a potato-bug!" And Aunt Emma put her hand on his as if to quiet him.

"Well, you certainly don't want to be," she said. "Now, I'm going to find a nice book for us."

"I do so!" he answered her. "I do want to be a potato-bug, so!"

Aunt Emma looked almost discouraged for a minute.

"Why David—" she said, "*think* what you are saying! A potato-bug! Now think what an undesirable thing to be! Of course you don't want to be anything of the kind!"

"I do so! I do so want to be a potato-bug!" David answered her, and he began to cry at the same time.

"Now don't David!" Aunt Emma said. "It's so foolish. Why—*think!* A potato-bug! You don't realize what an unfortunate thing it would be for you. And besides you couldn't be my little boy if you were a potato-bug."

David didn't seem to care very much about that, anyway it didn't change his mind any.

"I do so—want to be a potato-bug!" he hollered, and father turned round again in his chair. Mother was on the other side of the table and it looked to me as if perhaps she was trying not to smile, but father wasn't trying anything like that. He looked first at David and then at me.

"Felix! What are you doing?" he said. "And why aren't you in bed?"

I told him I was studying, and it wasn't my bedtime anyway.

"Well, don't waste time talking then," he said, "but get it done and go to bed! We should like a little peace and quiet, if there's any such thing to be had," he said.

But it didn't really look as if there was. Because after the little pause he had just had, David started in again worse than ever.

"*I want to be a potato-bug!*" he hollered, and he hit Aunt Emma's book quite a good-sized blow. "*I want to be a potato-bug!*" he hollered again. And it looked as if nobody could tell what would happen next, if they didn't let him be a potato-bug. But of course it was something just about impossible to ask too, and Aunt Emma began to look really kind of desperate.

"David, I am almost ashamed of you," she said, trying to take him on her lap. "Why, Felix looks as if he didn't know what to

make of you! Tell him what a foolish boy he is, Felix. Tell him it isn't sensible to act so."

There was something about her saying that, that made David act worse than anybody had ever seen him act yet, and that is saying a good deal.

"*I will be a potato-bug—so!*" he hollered, with his face turning quite purple. "*I will be a potato-bug!*"

"Well, I don't think you would like it much anyway," I said. "Because they put hellebore on potato-plants, and you would probably die from death by poison, and more than all that you would be apt to get stepped on, if you didn't keep a pretty good lookout, too."

"Felix!" father interrupted, very stern and clear, "did you hear what I told you about studying your lesson?"

I started to explain about Aunt Emma speaking to me, but he wouldn't pay any attention.

"That's enough!" he said. "You have been

brought up to obey. You may go upstairs to bed."

That was what he said, and of course there wasn't anything the least fair about it, because anybody can see I was just doing what Aunt Emma asked me, and yet I had to go to bed for it, when it wasn't my bedtime—and David was really doing the very thing she asked him not to, and yet he could sit up for it, when it was way *past* his bedtime.

I think I was going to say something, when an unexpected thing happened.

"Oh, David!" Aunt Emma almost screamed, "you are tearing the book! Oh, careful—it's your Uncle Joseph's book! You are *tearing* it, David!"

"*I will be a potato-bug!*" David answered her, stamping his feet and making more noise than he had ever done before.

Father got up from his chair then.

"Don't let's hear that again," he said. "You will *not* be a potato-bug, and that's the end of it! Do you understand that the subject

"'*I will be a potato-bug!*' David answered her, stamping his feet."

is *closed?* Once and for all, *whatever else you may be,* you will *never be a potato-bug!* Is that perfectly clear now, sir? *Under no circumstance will you ever be a potato-bug!"*

"I will be a potato-bug—so—" and David kind of choked it out, as if that was all he was going to say about it.

Father seemed to step forward a little, and David started for the door. Not only that, but he had the book about Reincarnation in his hand.

"Oh, careful!" Aunt Emma said again, and she looked at father perfectly discouraged.

"Oh, Jo," she said, "he has such a fearfully active mind, I simply can't keep up with him!"

"Well, I think I can keep up with him," father replied. And he took about three steps across the room.

David gave one look behind him, and then he gave another look at the open fire. It looked as if he wouldn't stop at anything now. Anyway, the next anybody knew, the book

about Reincarnation was blazing up the chimney.

Father took one more step then, and in another minute he had a good square hold of David by the collar. He had forgotten all about me. So had everybody. They were just looking to see what was going to happen next. And I don't think David was ever so surprised in his life. I guess Aunt Emma was surprised, too. Anyway she gave kind of a gasp.

"Do what you think best, Jo!" she said, as if she was most crying about it. "Deal with him as you think best! I shan't interfere!"

I don't think it would really have made any difference to father whether she interfered or not. From the looks, I guess he thought he would manage David this time, himself. Anyway, he just turned him round by the collar and marched him across the room, and out of the door, and up the stairs. I think it was the most unexpected thing that had ever happened to David. From the expression on his face as

he was going through the door it looked that way, anyhow.

None of us said anything, but of course the doors were all open upstairs, and pretty soon David's mother began to cry. Mother looked at her and then she spoke.

"He needs it, Emma," she said. "He certainly needs it."

Aunt Emma didn't reply, but she put her face right down into her handkerchief and she kept it there. The queer thing was, that from the time father had taken hold of him by the collar, David hadn't made a sound. I guess it was from surprise. Perhaps it was from surprise that Aunt Emma acted the way she did, too. Anyway, she didn't really uncover her face and look up again, till she heard steps on the stairs. It was father and David coming down.

Well, I wish you could of seen the expression on David's face as he came into the room. He didn't really look as if he saw much of anybody there. His mother walked up to him

and took hold of his hand, and he went right along with her and stood there just beside her, when she sat down again. But I don't think he saw her, either. I don't really think he saw anybody but father, and he was looking at him and nowhere else. It was as if he couldn't look anywhere else, whether he wanted to or not.

Aunt Emma was the first to speak.

"I guess he's sorry," she said, still wiping her eyes with her handkerchief. "I guess he'll tell you he's *very sorry* for what he did."

But David didn't make any reply; he just kept right on looking at father the same way as before.

"Perhaps he'll be a little more obedient in the future, that's the principal thing," father said. "What do you think about it, David?"

David kept right on looking at him but he didn't make the least reply.

I couldn't help remembering about a man I heard of once, that was made deaf and dumb for life through a fearful surprise he got. I

couldn't help wondering if David was deaf and dumb for life. But father didn't seem to be thinking of anything like that.

"I should think it would be a good plan for him to put those books right side up again, before he goes to bed," he said.

"Yes David," his mother said. "Go and straighten out the books; that's a good boy."

The strange thing happened then. David just went right over to the bookcase and began straightening out the books.

When he had finished, his mother got up from her chair.

"It is past bedtime," she said quite softly. "Can you say good night, David?"

It usually took about an hour to get David started for bed, but another strange thing happened then. He said good night, quite softly, too, and then David took hold of his mother's hand and went walking right out of the room with her. Father and mother looked at them and mother smiled a little. But father turned right round to me.

"Didn't I tell you to go to bed some time ago, Felix?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I answered.

"Well go," father said.

And so much had happened now, that I didn't care whether I went to bed or not. So I said good night and went upstairs.

But before I went to sleep I got thinking about all kinds of things. About David and Aunt Emma, and the way she would act with him—and about father and mother and the way they would sometimes act with me—and about breakfast time and the way they tried to make me eat my dish, and the way Aunt Emma let David go without eating anything at all—and about the way father told me to go to bed for nothing, and the way Aunt Emma let David sit up and cry to be a potato-bug—and about all the different kinds of fathers and mothers there are anyway—till I got so confused I couldn't seem to go to sleep at all. Because the way of it seems to be, that some of them will let their children do most anything

they want to, whether it is good or bad, without really stopping them, and some of them are apt to stop them anyway, whether it is good or bad, or whatever it is. It doesn't really look as if either way was exactly the right way to do. And I should think they might manage it some way, to make their children behave, and be kind of sensible and pleasant at the same time. Because then they surely wouldn't talk to you as if they wanted you to eat your dish at breakfast, and they wouldn't send you upstairs for nothing, and another thing they wouldn't let you get acting like David Dodd, either. I guess that is sure. They wouldn't let you get acting like David Dodd, anyway.

There is one thing though, I am kind of glad father gave David that spanking, because Aunt Emma had acted that way with him so long, that I think it had reached the point where it was the only thing. David didn't seem to forget it either. He didn't forget it all the rest of his visit, anyway. Father says he hopes he never will.

There are surely all kinds of mothers in the world. I have decided that, anyway. I have seen one now that is different from Aunt Emma in just about every way you can think of. And I am putting in an extra page here to say you needn't read this chapter if you don't feel like it. It is likely to discourage you, so perhaps you better skip it entirely. Mother says it is the saddest thing she ever read, and what in the world am I spending my time writing about such things for.

Well, the principal reason I wrote it is because it really happened, and as I told you in the beginning, that is what this book is for—to tell things the way they really happen. The other reason is, it looks as if it belonged here.

You can read it or not, either way you like.

CHAPTER VII

THE LITTLE BOY ACROSS THE HALL

YOU will be surprised to hear that I have been to the hospital. It was a surprise to me, anyway, because I never thought I would have to do anything like that. But you see I had appendicitis. When you have that, you have to have your appendix taken out or you will get worse if you don't.

It was a Thursday evening when they first

told me I was going, and they said they were going to take me the next morning. You see they were going to have the operation Saturday morning and they wanted to have me there on time. I couldn't really believe it, and I didn't have any idea what it would be like till I got there. And then I was surprised to see that it didn't look so very different after all. I guess one reason was that I had a little room all to myself and it looked the way most any little room might look. Mother said that was because I was a private patient, and that in the public wards they had the beds all along in rows in one room. I don't think I would like that so well, because you wouldn't know who was in the other beds, and if you did know, perhaps you might not like them, either.

Well, as I said, they were going to have the operation Saturday morning, and I guess it wasn't more than nine o'clock when two or three nurses began coming in to get me ready for it, and next you knew they were wheeling me out of the room on something that seemed

like a long, narrow table. It was to get me into another room where there were two or three doctors waiting for me. Of course they acted quite nice and pleasant with me and talked and laughed a little, but they didn't waste any time either and almost the first thing they did was to begin giving me ether to put me to sleep. I suppose that is the reason that I don't remember anything about the operation, or how it felt or anything. The first thing I do remember I was waking up in my little room again, and there was a nurse leaning over the bed looking at me. I know I felt pretty bad, anyway. And I felt that way most all the rest of the day—as if I had eaten something that made me so sick that I wouldn't ever want anything again.

Mother was there with me in the afternoon and she kept talking to me in a low voice and telling me I would feel better in the morning. I didn't think I would but she was right about it. Sunday morning I felt as if I couldn't wait to get something to eat. Of course it is

different after an operation. Sometimes you begin feeling better very quick, and sometimes you don't begin for a long time. They said it looked as if I was going to be very quick. And when mother came Sunday afternoon, she laughed and said she guessed the question was, how were they going to keep me there the proper time. I knew what she meant, because they made me lie so still in bed I could see it was going to get very tiresome. It did, too. And for two or three days they had to keep putting their hands on me to keep me still. I guess it was Wednesday or Thursday before they would let me move round in bed by myself. It was Wednesday. It was the same day that I found out about Sunnie. I think that was the way they spelled it. It is the way I am going to spell it, anyway.

Sunnie was the little boy in the room just opposite mine across the hall. I don't know whether that was his real name or not but his mother called him that, and perhaps you don't know it but the reason I thought of writing

this chapter in the beginning was really just on account of him.

He had been there several weeks before I came at all. I don't know exactly what was the matter with him, but I heard them say it was rather unusual for a child and it was something like inflammatory rheumatism that caused some trouble with his heart too. They said he was better but he had to lie real still. The first time I saw him was that Wednesday afternoon when they left my door open and his, too, at the same time. I could see him almost as well as if he was in the same room because his bed was right along in a line with mine, and I lay there and looked at him. He didn't notice me. He was kind of looking around, not as if he saw anything special either, but as if perhaps there was something he was worrying a little about. That is the way his eyes looked anyway. He was quite small and a nurse went up to the bed just then while I was looking at him, and sat down and gave him something out of a glass. She made

him talk and smile a little and just then the telephone bell rang in the hall and she put down the glass and went out.

"Yes," I heard her say. "Oh, he's getting along very nicely."

There was a little pause then. She was listening, I guess. Then she spoke again.

"Yes, of course he enjoys having you come," she said. "I'll tell him."

She went back to the bed and I guess she told him his mother was coming to see him. Anyway, I heard him say, "Mamma?" something as if he was asking a question, and then he began to laugh in the funniest little sounds you ever heard and wriggle round in bed as if he was trying to sit up.

The doors were still open and I wish you could have seen him when she came in. He began to laugh in those funny little sounds and wiggle round in bed again and reach out his arms as if he couldn't really wait to get to her. I remember she had on a long coat that made her look nice and smooth all over and she had

a smooth looking feather going back on one side of her hat.

She reached down her hands to him and he reached up his arms and then she leaned down and kissed him.

"Well, Sunnie, how are you?" I heard her say, and she kissed him again and tried to make him get quiet.

"You mustn't wiggle so, son," she said. "Mother can't come and see you if you *wiggle* so."

She meant it would make him worse I think. I don't know whether he understood about that, but he understood about her not coming to see him, anyway. Because he stopped smiling and looked perhaps as if he was a little scared.

"I aren't wiggling," he said.

Of course he was so young his voice wasn't very large, but I could hear what he said and he repeated it in about the same words, as if he was afraid she didn't hear.

"I aren't—going to wiggle," he said.

She laughed a little and then I could hear her talking. It was a good deal about how he must be a good boy and get well, and then I could see she was playing something with him, with his hands. He laughed, himself, then, right out loud, and it looked as if he was having a pretty good time, too. When she got up to go I thought for a minute perhaps he was going to cry.

"Now—now, you're going to be a good little boy," she said. "Mother can't come to see you if you cry."

He didn't cry, but he put his head down in the clothes, and she had to push them back with her hands to kiss his face.

"He's such a baby," she said to the nurse, smiling at the same time. "I don't know why, I'm sure I don't have time to baby him very much. Unfortunately I have too much else on hand."

"He's four, isn't he?" the nurse asked her.

"Yes, small for his age, but just four last month," she said, pushing the clothes back a

little more from his face. "Now be a man, Sunnie!"

He cried then.

"I want to go—with you!" he said.

"Now come—come, *be a man,* Sunnie! Mother's got to go, but she'll come back again!" She kissed him again and turned round to go out. I guess she heard him crying as she went down the hall, but she didn't come back, and I suppose it really wouldn't have made it any better if she had.

The nurse didn't go after her, anyway. Instead, she gave him a little attention herself, and pretty soon he stopped crying and they shut up both our doors after that, first his and then mine.

I didn't see anything more of him till dinner-time the next day. They had brought my tray in to me, and they were carrying one in for him, too. But the nurse hadn't any more than sat down to feed him before the telephone bell rang, just the way it did the day before, and she had to get up again.

"Yes, he's getting on beautifully," I heard her say at the telephone. "Yes, I'll tell him."

She only talked a minute, but he was watching for her when she came back.

"Is mamma—coming?" he asked.

"No," she said, "Auntie Bradford is coming to see you this afternoon."

He smiled then and I heard them telling afterward that she was someone that lived next to them and thought everything of him. She wasn't his real aunt, but she called herself so on account of knowing him so well.

I guess it was about three o'clock when Auntie Bradford came. There was someone else with her and they stood outside my door because Sunnie's door was shut and they had to keep them waiting just a minute.

"His mother ought to be ashamed not to spend more time with him," I heard Auntie Bradford say.

She sounded kind of mad and the other lady looked surprised, too.

"Doesn't she?" she asked.

"Oh, she always has so much on hand," Auntie Bradford answered. "I haven't any patience with her. Oh, she sees to it that he's taken good *care* of, I don't mean that. Of course she always keeps him beautifully dressed and all that, but the little chap's positively hungry for her affection. Well, he doesn't get much of it, I tell you that. And I doubt if she has very much to give, anyway."

That was the way Auntie Bradford talked and I could see her kind of snap her lips together. The other lady spoke then.

"I think a good many women find themselves mothers without having the real qualities for it," she said.

The door opened then and they went in. When they came out I could tell from the looks of Sunnie's face that he had been having a pretty good time.

Well, I don't know what happened that night, but there was one thing I was sure of and that was that Sunnie was worse. I would keep hearing things all night and they went in

and out and their steps were pretty quick, too.

"Mamma!" I could hear him cry. "Mamma!"

It was earlier than usual when the telephone began ringing the next day. It was pretty soon after breakfast and we had breakfast early there. I knew from the sound that it was Sunnie's mother that was talking.

"Yes," the nurse said, "yes, he's doing very nicely this morning."

His mother spoke then.

"No," the nurse replied. "He was rather uncomfortable in the night and a little fretty, but we always expect these ups and downs after these acute attacks. He's doing beautifully to-day."

I couldn't hear what Sunnie's mother said, but the nurse answered her.

"Very well, yes," she said, "I understand, good-by," and she hung up the receiver.

It was about the middle of the morning that all the nurses were away from that end of the hall. I don't know what they were doing, but

they had left the doors open and none of them were anywhere round. I raised myself up in bed just a little and looked across the hall at Sunnie. He was lying there looking real white and pale, and I kind of waved my hand round in a circle to get his attention. As I have said, our beds were just on a line. Pretty soon he saw me. He didn't look surprised; he just lay there looking at me from his bed.

"Somebody telephoned just now," I said, speaking in something like a very loud whisper. "Somebody telephoned and I guess perhaps your mother's coming to see you."

He began to wiggle round in bed a little then, as if he was going to sit up. But I heard steps coming down the hall. It was the nurse coming back and I lay right down again.

I could hear Sunnie's voice as she came in.

"Is mamma—coming?" he asked.

"No, not to-day," she answered.

He looked up and I could see his chin shake just a little.

"I—want—to see—mamma," he said with-

out crying at all, but with the pauses longer than usual between his words.

"Oh well, perhaps she'll be in to-morrow," she answered.

She didn't come in to-morrow though, but she telephoned in the morning and the nurse said he was getting on very nicely. He had been crying for her in the night because I heard him. I wondered if that was the way they always did in hospitals—if they always said you were getting on very nicely. But I remembered once I heard them say that somebody had just died. I guess it is apt to be one of those two things.

But it didn't look to me as if Sunnie was getting on so very nicely either. That was the day I heard them talking in my room about him. I couldn't hear everything they said, but it was something about the main difficulty being all right, it was improving all the time, that wasn't it, but they didn't like that little organic weakness.

"Perhaps you better mention that to his

mother, next time she calls up," I heard one of them say.

"Oh, it isn't serious," the other one answered. "She knows all about it. She'll probably be in this afternoon anyway."

I think they said the same thing to Sunnie—about her being in, in the afternoon, I mean.

Well, I know you won't like what happened, but it is true and I am telling it just the way it was. Of course he lay there and waited. I guess he thought if he was very quiet perhaps his mother would come quicker. Anyway he was very quiet. Once he began to wiggle a little under the clothes.

"Is mamma—coming?" he asked.

"Yes, pretty soon," the nurse answered and she sat down to take his pulse.

"Oh, you're getting nice and strong," she said, as she got up again, and she went and made some crooked marks on her big sheet of paper. When the telephone bell rang that time Sunnie raised his head right up.

The nurse didn't say much this time. It was

someone at the other end that was doing most of the talking. Pretty soon she spoke though.

"Yes, I'll tell him," she said. "I understand. Yes, he's doing beautifully this afternoon. Much stronger than he's been for several days. Yes, I understand."

She put down the receiver and she came back across the room and stood by the bed.

"Your mother can't come this afternoon," she said, as if she felt a little bad about it herself. "She says she's awfully sorry to disappoint you again, but she's coming to see you to-morrow, anyway."

He looked up at her as if he didn't quite understand at first.

"Isn't mamma—coming?" he said.

"No, not this afternoon," she answered. "To-morrow morning."

He didn't say any more, but I don't believe I could ever forget the way his face looked.

"Now, try to be a man," the nurse said. "She's coming to-morrow."

He pushed his head into the bedclothes. I

think he was trying to be a man, but he wasn't the right age for it. I could hear something like a high, smothered little cry coming out of the clothes. It didn't seem as if anything could stop him now. He had felt so sure she was coming this time anyway. I guess that was it. That seemed to make it worse anyway. Because he had been so very sure of it.

I know I sat up in bed. My nurse was shaking down her thermometer and I know I spoke, too.

"She doesn't know the way he wants to see her!" I said. "They just keep telling her he's getting on so beautifully!" I said. "They ought to tell her the way he wants to see her, but they just keep telling her he's getting on so beautifully!"

That was the very way I spoke anyway, and she answered me.

"So he is," she said real low and calm. "If we got excited every time a child cries for its mother we'd have trouble too much of the time."

She went out then and down the hall, and Sunnie's nurse had to get up for something, too. She gave a little pat to the bedclothes, and then she went down the hall, herself. I could hear the high, smothered little cry going on just the same. It was as if it couldn't ever stop.

I got up out of my bed and I stood up on the floor. The nurses had both gone. I didn't care what happened. I knew I had got to do something anyway. I went out into the hall in my bare feet and I looked way down to the end. There wasn't anybody there and I gave a quick glance at Sunnie's bed. All there was there, was a little bit of a heap under the bedclothes. I said I didn't care what happened and I didn't. I took one more look round me though and then I stepped up to the telephone. I knew the right number because I had heard the nurse use it so many times, and it was Four O. I could hear the little smothered cry going on just the same and I spoke right into the telephone and said, "Four O, please."

It wasn't more than a second before someone answered it. I knew who it was. I had to speak very quick, too. They would be back.

"Well?" the voice said, at the other end.

"Your little boy is crying for you very hard," I answered. "He needs you very much," I said. "If you don't come to see him pretty quick I don't know what will happen," I said.

She tried to break in then and ask a question. I guess she was surprised and wanted to know who was talking. But I didn't give her a chance.

"You better come," I said. "I think he is worse anyway. I think that is the reason he cries more, because he is worse. You better come as quick as you can."

I didn't know whether he was worse or not, but I knew she had got to come anyway, and that is what I said. I didn't wait for any answer, either. I just hung up the receiver and ran back to bed. I was scared after I

got there. I don't think I really knew what I had done till I got there. Of course it was the first time I had been out of bed because I hadn't sat up yet, and it was so strange to be standing up there on the bare floor like that. I guess I began to shake a little. But I heard steps out there in the hall and my nurse came in. She didn't notice me at first and then she looked at me very sudden.

"Are you cold?" she said. "What's the matter?"

"A little," I answered, and she got out another cover and put it over me. I stopped shivering pretty soon, and I heard Sunnie's nurse come back. Then I just lay there. I felt as if I was waiting for something, and yet I wasn't sure whether anything was going to happen or not. I waited for almost an hour I guess. Sunnie's door was shut and I didn't know at all what they were doing in there. I was just lying there looking at it. All of a sudden it opened very quick and the nurse came out. She crossed the hall and came into

my room. She was going to say something to my nurse when there were some more steps.

"Why, how strange!" I heard her say. "She said she wasn't coming. Well, tell her she can see him."

She opened Sunnie's door wide then, and she went across to his bed and looked down.

"Your mother's coming to see you, after all," she said.

I saw Sunnie kind of jump a little, as if it almost frightened him. And then I saw him try to raise himself right up in bed. His nurse leaned over and put her hands on him.

"Now—lie still," she said. "Lie very still and she will come, in just a minute."

I could see him very well. There was a long streak of sunlight coming in through the window and it seemed to shine right on him so that his face was all covered with little trembling lights. I know he tried to lie very still, but I could see his toes wiggling under the clothes.

Then her steps came down the hall and she went in.

Sunnie was sitting up in bed. I was afraid he was going to get up. But she crossed the room very quick. I think he started to laugh, but it turned out more like a cry. She knelt down beside the bed and put her arms round him. You could hear those funny little sounds like laughing, and yet more like crying.

"There—Sunnie—there," I heard her say.

She tried to put him back on the pillow then, but she seemed to keep her arms around him. I could see his face again, and I wish you could have seen it, too. It was as if there wasn't anything else at all that he really wanted. His mother had come. He had waited a long time for her but she was really there and it was all Sunnie had wanted from the very start.

I don't know just how long she stayed. They shut the door up pretty soon after that and it seemed as if she was in there a long time with the nurse and Sunnie. When she came out again she looked as if she had been crying.

"He's sound asleep," she said. "You—you

ought to have told me about this old weakness. If he is worse in the night, I want to be told, no matter what time it is."

She went away then.

I guess it was after twelve o'clock at night when she came back. It seemed very late for anybody to come, but I am telling it just the way it was, and I knew because the night nurse came into my room and then she went out again very quick and stopped a minute in the hall with her hand on my door. She was speaking to someone there. The light was dim and I couldn't see very well, but I could hear her voice. It was Sunnie's mother. She had come again, and they both of them went into his room. I think the doctor was in there, too.

My door was open just a crack now, and as I said, the light was dim in the hall. I don't really know whether Sunnie's door was open or not, but I know it was very still. And I know after a while the night nurse came back. There was someone following her and kind of feeling at her arm. The nurse turned up my

light a little and she turned round as if she didn't know anyone was really right there behind her. It was Sunnie's mother. Her face was very white and there were queer marks on it.

"You ought to have told me—more about it," she said.

"He has been getting on very well," the nurse answered her. "You knew about this old weakness."

She motioned to her to go out into the hall again. She didn't like to have her talking right there in my room. But Sunnie's mother didn't seem to understand. She half turned round with that white look on her face and looked at me.

"Another little boy?" she kind of mumbled.

The nurse put her hand on her shoulder to have her go out, but she kept on standing there, looking at me.

"I suppose they didn't see—each other?" she mumbled again. "They might have been —good company for each other?"

That is the way it sounded, something like a question, and yet as if she couldn't say it very smooth either.

"Did you ever—see each other?" she asked.

I looked at her to answer. I suppose it was because Sunnie had died that she looked so white. But I didn't think about that. I thought of something else. I thought of the way she had kept him waiting and waiting for her when he was alive.

"What are you thinking about—little boy?" she said in a whisper.

"About the way he cried for you," I answered. "And the way you didn't come."

She put her hand out very quick, as if she was trying to get away from something that frightened her.

"Did he—cry for me?" she said. She turned round to the nurse.

"You ought—to have told me that—" she said. "You told me—you told me—it was all going so well."

"So it was," the nurse answered. "We are

hardly expected to report it, every time a child cries, are we?"

"Was he unhappy?" she said, in a low voice without much sound to it.

I remembered the way he looked up in the afternoon, when they told him she wasn't coming.

"Yes, he was," I answered her.

"Not unusually so," the nurse said. "You must really come into the hall, Mrs. Thayer. We can't have the patient kept awake."

She looked back at her, with a wide, strange look in her eyes.

"You ought to have kept him happy!" she said. "I put him in your charge! It was your business to keep him happy!"

"I beg your pardon, it is our business to attend to physical ills," the nurse answered her.

"Physical ills," she repeated whispering. "And a *child?*"

"We do our best," the nurse answered. "But you must understand. We don't have time to

baby them very much. We have too much else on hand."

For a minute, I couldn't tell what it was that made me feel so queer. But I have remembered since. What the nurse said then—was the very same thing. Sunnie's mother said that first afternoon that she came to the hospital. The nurse spoke once more.

"We kept you truthfully informed about your child's case," she said. "We really aren't supposed to supply the affections of the mother, or to dictate her part to her either, if she doesn't know it, herself."

Sunnie's mother started to go out—and she was feeling for the nurse's arm the same way that she was when she came in.

The nurse turned down my light and shut the door.

Sunnie's mother had gone and I was all alone. My room was dark, but it was as if I could see things very clear.

And I knew then that hospitals can never be the same as mothers—because they haven't

the time for it. Not only that, but I knew too, that sometimes mothers can't be the same as mothers—because they haven't the time for it, either.

There is one thing that I am glad of, though. And that is that Sunnie's mother really did get there, after all. If I hadn't telephoned I think it would have been too late. Because I heard them say the next morning that he never waked up again, after he went to sleep in her arms in the afternoon. And I guess it was the best way to have it end. Because I don't think she would ever have given him very much attention, and he would have been so lonesome.

I think you would have thought so yourself, if you could have seen the little lights all trembling on his face, when he saw her coming. Because it was all Sunnie had wanted from the very start.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOCKED HOUSE

WHEN I got back from the hospital it was almost Christmas time. Well, Christmas has come and gone now and I am about as well as ever. You don't realize, when special things are going on like that, how fast time is going. It is the fifteenth of January now. The reason I have begun writing again is because I have something to tell you that I think you would like to hear.

It isn't sad or anything like that, so you don't have to worry. It is about father. Of course I suppose if your father is Mayor you have to be prepared for almost anything to happen. Mother says you do, and she says the life of a public official is never safe. But I never saw mother more scared at the mail than she was when it came last Friday morning.

Father was in the hall, just starting to go out and at the same time opening some letters.

"Well," he said, "things are getting dramatic. They say if I disappoint them, I die to-night!"

He smiled and passed the letter on to mother.

"I guess I'll risk it," he said.

He tore open a paper with the same smile on his face. But mother turned quite white.

"Sh—sh!" she said, looking at me. "Come Felix, it's school time," she said.

She put her hand on father's arm.

"What on earth does it mean, Jo?" she said in a low voice.

"Oh, it's this row over Gallagher, father an-

swered. "They're trying to scare me, but I'm afraid it doesn't work. I'm going to dismiss him for good reasons, and I'm going to do it to-day."

He held out his hand for the letter, but mother was looking at it with that same white, scared look on her face.

"Oh Jo," she whispered, "what are you going to do about it? *Don't* do anything rash to-day! They mean just what they say. Are you going to notify the police? Of course, you must notify the police at once!"

"Nonsense!" father answered, kind of laughing and putting the letter in his pocket with some others. "Didn't you ever hear of this sort of thing before?"

He put his hand on the doorknob.

"Now don't be childish," he said. "This is just one of the little varieties of public life. You're not used to it, that's all."

"I'm afraid I'm not," mother replied in a rather small voice. Then she put one of her hands up on his shoulder.

"Will you notify the police?" she said. "If you won't do it for your own sake, I really think you ought to do it for mine."

He smiled and turned round to go out.

"I'll think about it," he said. "Now just dismiss it from your mind."

Mother looked after him as he went down the steps, and then she shut the door and glanced round as if she didn't really know what she was going to do next.

"Dismiss it from my mind!" I could hear her whisper, and I opened the hall closet to get my cap.

"Why, Felix," mother said, "I thought you had gone. What are you waiting for—hearing all this talk about nothing?"

She put my cap on my head and kissed me good-by, and I didn't really wait for anything more. I started right along to school. It sounded to me though, as if mother thought it would have been better if I hadn't heard what they were talking about. But I had, and I couldn't seem to help thinking about it all

the way to school. I guess I thought about it quite often until I was started for home again. I didn't really think father would be at home for lunch, because he is so busy he usually has it downtown. Well, he wasn't and mother and I had our lunch alone. She didn't talk as much as usual and it didn't do me very much good to talk either, because she didn't seem to hear it very well. I knew what she was thinking about. It was about that letter father had in the morning.

"Is father going to get the police here?" I asked her, just as we were getting up from the table.

"Oh no, no," mother answered very quick. "What are you talking about, child?"

I began to say something about the letter then, but mother interrupted me before I was really started.

"Sh—sh, don't talk about such foolish things, Felix!" she said. "Don't even think about such—things!"

She turned her head and moved her hands

quick when she talked, so I didn't say any more and neither did mother. I felt as if I would like to see father though, and yet I knew he didn't like to have me go down to his office unless it was something very important. Well, something happened that afternoon that I wasn't expecting.

It was about four o'clock and I was just starting out with my flexible flier to slide on Beaman's Hill when I noticed a horse and sleigh coming down the street very fast. I thought at first it was a runaway, but when it came nearer I saw that it wasn't. It was a one-seated sleigh with two men in it. The thing that surprised me was that they began to slow up as they came nearer and when they were right opposite the house, they stopped.

"Hullo, Bub," one of them said. "Mayor Blanchard live here?"

I told him yes, he did, and he glanced at the house and then he glanced at me.

"Anywhere about?" he asked.

I suppose he meant by that, was he at home,

and of course he wasn't at that time of day, and I thought it was a queer thing to ask, anyway.

"No he isn't," I said. "He never gets home before six o'clock."

They both of them looked at the house then and the other man spoke.

"Here in the evening?" he said.

"Sometimes," I answered, "but not very often."

"Always in before midnight like a good boy, I suppose?" the first one said, and then they both laughed.

I decided it was better not to make any answer at all, no matter what they said. And it looked as if they were going to drive off. They were both looking at the house though. One of them was looking at the front door and the other was looking at the side. He drove the horse on a few steps until he could see the path that led round to the back door. I even thought he was looking at the basement windows.

"Well, Sunnie, tell your dad we're sorry not to see him," he said. And then he whipped up the horse and the next anybody knew they were going down the street at the same pace they had come up—something like a runaway.

Well, I went in the house and I told mother about it. When I had finished she went to the window and then she glanced at the clock.

"Your father will be home to dinner before very long," she said. "Don't say anything about this. I'll tell him myself, if I think necessary."

But the later it got, the more nervous mother seemed to get. At half-past six the telephone bell rang and she went hurrying down the hall as if she couldn't really wait to get there. It was father at the other end. I could tell from the way mother talked.

"Can't get here?" she said. "Oh, Jo, we'll wait dinner. There's no hurry about it."

But I think he must have told her he couldn't anyway, because her voice sounded very disappointed the next time.

"Oh, well, I suppose you can't then," she said. "I'm so sorry! Wait," she said. I guess father was saying good-by. "Wait!" And her voice was so low it sounded something like a secret. "Did you do what I asked you to this morning?"

I had gone into the library by that time, and from there I could hear everything father said.

"Well no, I didn't," he said. "I'll tell you about that when I get home. Good-by, there's six men waiting for me now."

"Wait just a minute!" mother answered. I think she was going to tell him about the two men in the sleigh. But father had hung up the receiver.

"Oh, I suppose it wouldn't make any difference to him, anyway," she said as if she was talking to herself.

She glanced into the dining-room, from where she stood.

"Come Felix, dinner's all ready," she said.

We sat down together alone again, just as we did at lunch time. It was only six o'clock,

but of course we had to have the lights. I remember we had apple dumpling for dessert and just as Sarah brought it in, mother looked at me across the table as if she hadn't really noticed me very much before.

"You look tired, Felix," she said. "You must go to bed early to-night."

We went into the library after dinner and mother walked over to the window and pushed up the shade. It seemed early for it but the moon was just coming up. We could see it through the trees, shining down on the white snow.

"How lovely!" mother said, and then she looked down at me because the clock was striking eight.

"Come Felix," she said, "it's time to go upstairs."

She took hold of my hand and went up with me, and it wasn't very long before I was in bed and she was saying good night to me.

I lay awake for a little while looking at the way the moonlight came across the foot of the

bed in long wiggly lines. The queer part of it was they couldn't ever seem to get still. I watched them for a while and poked them from under the clothes with my foot, but they wouldn't stop moving for a single second and my eyes began to feel so dizzy that I shut them.

I don't know how long after that I was opening them again, but I knew by the feeling that I had been asleep and I guess I sat up in bed. There was someone moving just outside my door and I listened for a minute and then I was almost certain that somebody turned the knob. Well, I got right up to find out for sure, and I was glad I did. It was mother. She was standing there in a white wrapper and I could see her face quite plainly. I thought it was white, too, something like her wrapper.

"Oh, I didn't mean to wake you up, Felix," she said, "but there seems to be something wrong—I was just going downstairs."

"Has father come?" I said.

"No," mother answered, with her voice a little trembly, "he seems to be—very late."

She turned round to go downstairs and then she looked back at me over her shoulder.

"Just stay where you are—unless I call you," she said.

Well, I thought if she was going to call me I'd better be ready, so I got up and put down my window because it was pretty cold, and I put my clothes on, too. Then I waited and listened. But I didn't hear anything at all.

I went to the window and looked out, and it was so light from the moon that I could see everything very plainly. But it was all so still it didn't seem as if there could be anything to be scared about, and I didn't see what mother meant, anyway. I went to the top of the stairs and listened. Then I went down. There was a light in the front hall burning very low but no one was there and I went into the dining-room. There was no light at all there and I went through to the kitchen. There was no light there either, but I could see something

white over by the window. It was mother because she spoke.

"Who is it?" she said.

Well, I told her who it was and I guess there was something about the way I said it that gave her courage. Anyway she came across the room and put her hand on my arm.

"Perhaps it's just as well you came down," she said, in something like a whisper. "There's nothing to be frightened about, but there seems to be—someone in the basement."

She moved her hand up and down my arm.

"It couldn't have been locked up down there," mother said. "I heard them open a window from upstairs."

She stopped a minute, as if she was listening and the moonlight flickered up and down on the sleeve of her wrapper. Just then a clock began to strike, away off somewhere, and yet we could hear it very plainly. We stood there without moving until it had finished striking.

"Twelve o'clock," mother whispered.

Well, I hadn't heard anything in the base-

ment so far, and I was just wondering if there was anything to hear when mother took hold of my arm so tight it hurt. I don't know as I wonder much either. There was somebody coming up the basement stairs.

I could hear mother breathe, but she didn't make any sound or move at all—not until we heard the knob going round.

"I locked it," she whispered.

Then she let go my arm and ran into the hall. She was so quick and quiet about it that no one could have heard her, but when she took down the telephone receiver she dropped it as if her hand was shaky. In another minute though, mother was telephoning to the police station. Her voice sounded low and shaky, but I think they must have told her they would come. Anyway, when she said good-by, you could tell she felt a little better. It didn't last long though. In another minute there was a large crash in the basement.

"Oh goodness," mother whispered, "what's that?"

She leaned up against the hall door for a second. I presume she thought she would like to collect her thoughts. Because in about a minute she turned and walked back through the dining-room.

"That was the dumb-waiter," she said, as she went by me. And she went right into the butler's pantry. By the time I got there, she was standing by the dumb-waiter shaft and looking down. She wasn't far from the window, and I could see her face pretty well. It looked as if it was prepared for most anything this time. There was one thing though it really wasn't prepared for, and that was the thing that happened next. The dumb-waiter began to come up.

"They're using it for an elevator!" mother said in an awful kind of a whisper. "They're coming up!"

I guess there was something about her whisper that was quite penetrating. Anyway there came an answer from down below.

"I've tried every other method known to

man," it said. "It's the only way left to *get up.*"

It was father's voice.

The strangest thing about it all was that mother didn't seem to recognize it. She leaned away over and looked down.

"Don't you dare come any farther!" she said in a very shaky voice. "I'll shoot if you—come any farther!"

"I don't doubt it in the least," father replied quite pleasantly, and I think it was very nice of him under the circumstances. "Very likely," he said. "You've not only locked but bolted me out of the house, and you've had me a prisoner down here for a good fifteen minutes; now shoot me!"

Mother gave kind of a gasp and the dumbwaiter gave a jolt.

"It's your father," she said quite weakly.

She looked as if she really didn't know just what to say next, but she leaned over and looked down.

"Jo," she said, "is that you?"

"I hope so," father answered. "I've really had troubles enough without being anybody else."

Mother looked not only anxious but confused.

"Well, you can't come up *that* way!" she said. "You must go round to the stairs!"

"I've tried that, thank you," father replied. "This method I'm employing is one not only of necessity but of sheer human ingenuity. Fortunately this thing runs on the principle of an elevator, besides being made on a good commodious plan."

"Oh Jo," mother replied, more weakly than before, "why didn't you tell me it was you?"

"Tell you!" father repeated. "I've been taking particular pains not to wake you up! I didn't suppose this was a plot! I didn't suppose you were up there managing it!"

"I thought it was some of those dangerous characters," mother answered very faintly, something as if it was an apology. Then her voice came out just a little stronger.

"Now go back and go round the proper way Jo. I'll—unlock the door for you."

"I'll see you in just one minute!" father answered in quite a cheerful voice. Then the dumb-waiter stopped again with another jolt. "What's the matter now?" he said.

You could hear him give quite a big pull on the rope.

"Oh, dear," mother answered, "you'll get caught there next you know. It isn't used to such weights. And I don't see why you should think of coming upstairs in such a very strange way, really."

Father gave another pull at the rope.

"What's the *matter* with the thing?" he said.

"Why, I don't know, I'm sure I don't know Jo," mother replied. "It never did like that before. Pull on the rope."

"Pull on the rope!" father repeated, as if he was getting just a little provoked. "What do you suppose I'm pulling on, please?"

You could hear him working at it again. He

didn't speak for about a minute and when he did it didn't sound very encouraging either.

"Well, I guess I'm a fixture," he said.

Mother didn't seem to understand it.

"A fixture?" she said. "You don't mean you're *caught* there, do you?"

"That's just it," father replied. "Nice situation, isn't it?"

Just then the front doorbell rang real long and loud.

"What's that?" father asked very quick and short.

"Well, I don't know—exactly," mother answered, as if she was feeling more confused than ever, "but I guess—maybe it's—the police."

"The police!" father repeated, quicker and shorter than before. "What's the police to do with it?"

"You see I called them up before I knew it was you," mother explained, with a rather nervous sound to her voice.

"Called them up!" father repeated again.

"Well for gracious sake go out there and send them off! Great heavens, woman! You forget that I'm the Mayor! Don't you dare let the police in here!"

"No, no," mother answered, as if she was getting a good deal flustrated, herself, but the front door opened and we heard voices.

"Sarah must be up, too!" mother whispered.

I guess father heard it.

"Louise, go out there!" he said, something like a command. "I'll *not* be caught in this predicament by the police!"

And father began to jiggle round in the dumb-waiter as if he was going to start it some way, either up or down, and he didn't care much which.

Mother was starting but he scared her so that she turned round.

"Jo! Stop it!" she whispered. "You'll kill yourself."

Just as she said it the dumb-waiter started, too. It started down. In another minute there was about the worst crash you ever heard.

Mother put her hand up to her throat, the way she does when she is fearfully frightened, but she didn't say a word. All the lights seemed to be turned on though, and they came rushing in through the dining-room, Sarah with two big policemen behind her. Mother just looked at them, with her hand still up at her throat and then she pointed down the shaft where the dumb-waiter had gone down.

"What's the matter?" one of them asked very short. "Burglary?"

Mother couldn't seem to answer him. She just stood there pointing down.

"Show us the stairs!" he said to Sarah. "Be quick about it!"

Sarah got them to the stairs, and then I heard them pulling at the door.

"Break it," I heard one of them muttering. "They'll be gone—break it open Jack! I'll head 'em off outside!"

He got out to the front door in about four good long steps.

"Here Jack!" he called back very quick and

low, and in another minute both the policemen were out of the front door. What they were after, nobody could tell. I guess mother didn't even try. She was still standing there but she was leaning over and looking down.

"Are you there, Jo?" she whispered kind of hoarse.

The answer that came up sounded a little faint, and at the same time almost disgusted.

"Yes, I'm here," it said.

"Are you hurt?" mother whispered.

Father's answer sounded a little faint still, and still more disgusted if anything.

"No—" he replied. "I don't appear to be."

"Oh, thank fortune," mother said, and yet it was so low you could hardly hear it. She turned round and went to the door at the top of the basement stairs and unlocked it. I guess father heard it. Anyway, in another minute he was coming up the stairs. He smiled in that same disgusted way, when he saw mother.

"Why, what's the matter?" he said, looking

"'Why come, come—' he said, putting his arm round her shoulder."

at her again. "Did you think I'd killed myself?"

I guess he saw mother tremble.

"Why come, come—" he said, putting his arm round her shoulder, "cheer right up now! I'm nowhere near dead! Where's the police?"

Mother smiled a little then, and led father out to the front door. It was wide open and the two very same policemen were coming up the steps again. They weren't in so much of a hurry this time, and when they saw father and mother they both of them put their hands up to their foreheads. Then the one that did the talking before, spoke again.

"There've been two or three pretty seedy looking characters hanging round here," he said. "It's hard to tell what their plans were, and we couldn't get hold of them. But we've given them considerable of a chase and more of a scare I guess. They won't trouble you any more."

Mother turned round and looked at father.

"There!" she said.

But father was looking at the policemen.

"Thank you," he said. "I'm much obliged to you." He shook hands with them both. "I'm much obliged to you," he said again.

When they had gone mother looked at father the same way as before.

"There!" she said again. "What did I tell you?"

Father pushed his hand up through his hair and laughed.

"You still think they were after me?" he said. "Well, for the sake of interest we'll say they were. But for the sake of truth, I'll have to add that they won't have much further excuse for it. Gallagher simplified the situation to-day by sending in his resignation."

Mother took in a good, long breath, and there was quite a pause before she spoke again.

"Well, there's one thing to be thankful for," she said. "And that is, that just when they were *searching everywhere* for you, you were in a good safe place about midway between the basement and the dining-room."

"That's so," father replied. "I doubt if the best sleuth in the country could have tracked me."

Mother smiled just a little—and took in another good, long breath.

"I really think you owe your fortunate deliverance to me," she said.

CHAPTER IX

WHITE CHRYSANTHEMUMS

IT was ten below zero yesterday. And it was snowing when I waked up this morning. It is the first real big one that we have had this year and I jumped up as quick as I could to look out of the window. One of my windows faces east and the other south, and mother has them both open at night. She says it is almost as good as sleeping out of doors.

Well, it looked as if it was this morning.

Because the wind had been right from the east all night, so that the snow had blown in until there was a regular little drift of it across the floor. There is a fireplace in my room and I took the fire-shovel and threw the snow out, and then I shut up the windows. I was shivering so much by that time that I got back into bed again, and then I lay there and watched the snow drive past the south window from the east. It was pretty to watch because the air was so thick with it, it looked almost like feathers.

By the time we went down to breakfast the windows in the dining-room were all white. Luly was so excited when she saw them, she just began to hop and clap her hands. I guess it is the first very big snowstorm she can remember.

Mother told father he would be sensible to wear his fur overcoat, but he seemed to think his black one would be thick enough. He put on his high overshoes though, and as he opened the door to go out, the snow fell

into the hall and he had to brush it off his shoulders.

The path had been shoveled out once but it hadn't done much good either, and we stood there and watched father lifting his feet up high as he went out to the street. He stopped and spoke to someone there on the sidewalk, but mother closed the door then and shivered, too, with the cold.

I saw who it was though that father spoke to, and mother glanced at the open fire in the library, and then she glanced through the window and saw, too. It was Peaty and he had a big snowshovel in his hands. Father had gone on now and Peaty stood there as if he hadn't quite made up his mind what he would do.

"Oh, I wish someone would take that child and look after him," mother said, kind of half to herself. "What's he doing, anyway, out there in the storm?"

Mother has seemed to feel a little different towards Peaty ever since that time with Mrs.

Gaybud's ring that I told you about, and I heard her say to father the other day that she did wish people weren't so paralyzed of inheritance, and that Fanny Merritt would get interested in him. Fanny Merritt is a friend of mother's and lives down the street on the other side. She hasn't any children of her own, but from the way mother talked I think she meant that she would adopt one if she could find one that really suited her.

Well, when I saw Peaty out there with his snowshovel, I asked mother if I couldn't go out, too. It was Saturday morning, so there wasn't any school and mother looked at me as if she was thinking about it.

"I suppose if you are bundled up it won't do you any harm," she said, and it wasn't two minutes before I had on my gray overcoat and leggings and the cap that goes down over my ears, and was out there on the sidewalk, too.

"Hullo Peaty," I said, "where you going to?"

"I thought maybe I could get some walks to

shovel," Peaty answered, and he looked round again the same way he did when we first saw him. It was as if he couldn't decide just where to go.

Just then Peat came running along through the snow, too, and then he stopped as if he hadn't quite decided either. Of course I knew he would go with Peaty because he always does, but he likes to make you think perhaps he won't, unless he feels just like it.

Well, Peat gave a sniff at me as if he would like to know what was I there for, and then he nosed round at Peaty as much as to say "Well, make up your mind *somehow*," and Peaty turned round and started off down the street. It hadn't quite stopped snowing yet, but almost everybody had had their paths shoveled too. There was one house, across the street, that I happened to notice. It belonged to Mrs. Merritt, the one mother was talking about. I guess that was the reason I noticed it. And another reason was, she hadn't had any of her paths shoveled.

"There's one for you Peaty!" I said, and he started across the street without saying anything to anybody. It would have been better if he had had leggings on, because he got pretty deep in, getting across. But he didn't have, nor any overcoat either. I suppose the reason was because he doesn't own any. Nor any mittens, as far as that goes. But he doesn't pay much attention to it, and he walked up the steps of Mrs. Merritt's house and rang the doorbell.

By the time the door opened, I was up there, too, but it was a servant, I think, that opened it and she didn't look as if she knew much either. But Mrs. Merritt seemed to come out, right behind her, and when she saw Peaty standing there with his snowshovel she smiled and said why, yes indeed, of course she wanted her paths shoveled, she was beginning to get worried about them.

Peaty couldn't help smiling a little, when she said that, because of course it meant he would earn some money.

"You'd better begin right here, with the steps," Mrs. Merritt said, "and work your way down to the sidewalk."

She looked at me then and smiled some more.

"Why, good morning Felix," she said. "I didn't know you under all that cap. Are you shoveling paths, too?"

I told her I wasn't but I came with Peaty.

"Well, it's nice to see some little boys," she said. "I only wish I had a little boy of my own, just like you!"

She put out her hand then as if she would pat my cheek, only my cap was in the way so she couldn't.

I remembered again what mother said about her adopting somebody, and I looked down at Peaty. He had the steps all cleaned off and was down there on the walk shoveling away as hard as he could.

"He doesn't look warmly enough dressed for such a cold morning as this, does he?" Mrs. Merritt asked.

I have said that he didn't have any overcoat

on, and of course his suit looked thin and ragged, just the way it always does, and without any mittens his hands looked rather bluish, too.

"No, he hasn't got any father or mother," I said. "I guess that's the reason he doesn't usually have anything to wear to speak of. He lives just behind our house with his aunt."

"I know, I know—" Mrs. Merritt said, as if she had heard all about that before, and there wasn't any smile on her face now, either. But she was looking down at Peaty, and I think she had forgotten all about me, too. I was almost sure of what she was thinking about.

"If you wanted a boy to keep," I said, "I guess perhaps Peaty would be better for it than I would. Anyway he needs it more," I said.

I was kind of scared, after I had spoken right out like that, and Mrs. Merritt turned round to me with a quick, different smile that I hadn't seen before. Then she looked down at Peaty again. He was working so hard that

his head was way down, and you couldn't see his face. The snowshovel was so big that he didn't look much of any size beside it.

"Do you think he needs it very much?" she said, with her voice lower. I felt as if perhaps she was going to adopt him right off. And I answered in a good deal of a hurry.

"It looks as if he did," I said, "because he hasn't anybody to take care of him but his aunt, and she is usually so mean she is almost worse than nobody."

"She is so mean?" she repeated after me, as if she didn't exactly understand.

"Why, she never seems to do much but holler at him," I said, "and anybody can see he doesn't have anything worth mentioning to wear, and I guess usually he doesn't get anything worth mentioning to eat, either."

I was going to say some more, but she interrupted me.

"You know him pretty well, don't you Felix?" she said. "You seem to be ready to give him a pretty good recommendation."

"Well, if anybody wanted a boy to keep, I am almost sure he would make a good one," I said.

Peaty was way down on the sidewalk now. He had kept at it so hard ever since he started that you could see his breath coming in little pants. The snow was rather heavy. I guess that was the reason.

"He seems like a conscientious little boy," Mrs. Merritt said, as if she was talking to herself. "I—I'll remember your recommendation, Felix."

She smiled in that same way again, and turned round to shut the door. I turned to go down the steps. I was almost sure what she meant. She meant he was shoveling the paths to suit her, anyway, and I was almost sure she was going in to decide about adopting him.

Well, I guess I ought not to have done what I did, but I couldn't seem to help it. I went hurrying out there to the sidewalk and Peaty looked up for a minute and stopped shoveling. At the same time he drew his arm across

his face and gave a quick breath. Peat was stepping round there beside him, as if he couldn't decide whether to sit down or stand up.

"Say Peaty," I said real low, but as fast as I could, too, "you want to make it look real nice," I said, "because if you suit her well enough, maybe she might try adopting you," I said.

Peaty just looked at me as if he hadn't the least idea what I was talking about, and Peat looked at me as much to say, well, what did I mean by that, anyhow.

I wanted to have them understand it.

"To live with her," I said. "Just as if you belonged there. Only you want to do the path as good as you can," I said.

I was so afraid he wouldn't do it to suit her that that was the real reason that I told him. And Peaty looked right straight at me for a minute and then he bent over and went to shoveling again without saying a single word. He didn't speak at all till the sidewalk was all

done, and then he straightened up with that same little quick breath as before.

"I suppose she wants it done round to the back door, too," he said. He held the snow-shovel between his knees just a minute then, and put his hands up under his arms to warm them.

"I suppose so," I said.

He didn't wait any longer. He began on the path to the back door. And Peat was still stepping round beside him as if he couldn't decide whether to sit down or stand up. He looked as if he thought it was really too cold to do either. Peaty didn't pay much attention to him, but kept right on till he had finished the path to the back door, and then he came round to the sidewalk again and leaned the snow-shovel up against the gate. He stood there a minute looking up at the house without saying anything. I could tell that he was thinking of what I said—about living there with Mrs. Merritt. There was an open fire burning so that you could see it very plainly, and it

made red lights on the white door just beside it. Mrs. Merritt was by the window fussing over some pots, with tall, white flowers in them, and there was a cat that looked like an Angora sitting just near enough the fire to have it feel real nice and warm. As I have said, Peaty stood looking in there as if he was just thinking to himself, and then he turned round for the snowshovel. It had snowed a little on the path since he left it, and he began scraping at it as if he wanted to have it look very nice.

But Mrs. Merritt must have seen us. Anyway, the front door opened then and there she was.

"Come on, Peaty," I said, and we went right up the path to the steps, and Peat followed just behind us. At the top of the steps, Mrs. Merritt held out her hand as if she wanted us to come in.

"There's just one thing more I'd like to have you do," she said, looking at Peaty and glancing out at the sidewalk. "You did those

paths beautifully," she said. "Now there's just one thing more."

She turned round with another little motion to us, and we started to go in the house. Peat looked up as if he was just a little undecided. She hadn't seen him before.

"Oh, do send that dog away!" she said, looking down at him. "I—I'm afraid I don't like dogs! And—I have a cat, too! You'll really have to send him home!"

"Go home, Peat," Peaty said, and we went in and Mrs. Merritt shut the door.

"It's these pots of white chrysanthemums," she said, as we went into the big room where the fire made the red lights on the door. "I want them moved into the south window. But I think you'd better get warm first," she said, looking down at Peaty. She kept her eyes on him for a minute, and Peaty started to reach out his hands and then he stopped. It was as if he was going to warm them at the fire but didn't feel quite sure he had the right. He isn't really used to houses with things in

them, and having people nice to him like that, and I guess he was a little scared when Mrs. Merritt took one of his hands and felt of it.

"Why, it's just stiff and blue with cold," she said. "Now I want you to get warm and comfortable first of all."

I think perhaps she thought he would get more easy and used to it if she wasn't there. Anyway she said something about the telephone, and then she went out and left us there alone—just Peaty and I and of course the Angora cat—and the white chrysanthemums—and the fire making the red lights on the door, and of course all the rest of the things they have in houses.

Peaty seemed to look round him very slowly as if he must be careful or he might break something.

"It's an awful nice house, ain't it?" he whispered to me.

"Yes," I answered. "It would be great if you lived here all the time, wouldn't it?"

"'It's an awful nice house, ain't it?'"

He kept looking round him as if he was almost scared to think of such a thing.

"She wouldn't want me to really do anything like that, would she?" he said.

"I wouldn't be surprised if she would," I answered. "It looks as if that's the thing she's thinking about, anyway."

Peaty moved forward real quietly until he was just in front of the fire and then he stopped. I could see his shoulders kind of drop down, as if, for once, he could let go of himself without shivering. At the same time he took something like a deep, long breath. I think it was because he knew he was really warm. I could only see his back now and he stood there for a minute without speaking and then he turned his head and looked at me over his shoulder.

"She wouldn't take Peat," he said.

That was what he had been thinking about.

"No, she wouldn't take Peat," I answered after a while. "She said she didn't like dogs."

The Angora cat looked up then, as much as

to say she didn't either and that settled it. I watched Peaty's back for a minute more and then he turned his head and looked at me over his shoulder again.

"I couldn't go anywhere without Peat," he said.

Of course I knew what he meant. He meant that Peat had always been about the only regular friend he seemed to have, so he didn't like to go off and leave him now.

"Oh well, you don't want to let that decide it, do you?" I said. "Perhaps I could have Peat. I guess maybe mother would let me."

Peaty looked at the fire and I could hardly hear his answer, it was so small.

"Peat would know the difference," he said.

"But if she wanted you to really *live* here Peaty," I answered, "why you couldn't stop for *that,* and I guess Peat would have the sense to see it too, when he knew the way it was here, and the clothes she'd give you—and the nice things to eat—and places to get warm always—just like this—why, there'll be some-

body to look out for Peat, anyway," I said.

Peaty's voice was smaller than ever this time. I guess he was thinking of the way it was at home.

"Peat would know the difference," he said again, and his back seemed to kind of droop forward and look smaller, too.

But there were steps out there in the hall and Mrs. Merritt looked in at the door. It seemed to make Peaty remember what he came for, and he started right for the east window where the white chrysanthemums were.

"They're not heavy," Mrs. Merritt said.

I looked at the plant pots and I looked at Mrs. Merritt. And then I knew why she had asked Peaty to come in and move them. It was only an excuse to get him in the house. It wasn't the plant pots. There were only three of them, so it couldn't have been. Only three of them, and no weight at all.

"They're not heavy," Mrs. Merritt said, "but they're precious. Be careful of them," and she went down the hall again.

Peaty took one of the plant pots in his hands and started across the room to the south window.

"Don't drop it Peaty," I said. "If you do it just the way she tells you, she'll decide to have you live here for sure. You see if she doesn't."

Peaty stopped where he was, in the middle of the room, and didn't speak. The only sound there was, was the wind blowing against the blinds outside, and a little kind of a low whimper at the outside door. Peaty's lips seemed to move. It was as if he didn't know what he could do.

"What will I say if she asks me," he said.

"Well, I suppose you won't *refuse* her, will you?" I asked him.

Peaty's lips moved again.

"Do you think she's most sure to ask me?" he whispered. His eyes moved round the room from the fire and the red lights on the door and the Angora cat—back to the white chrysanthemums in his hand.

"She is if you do it to suit her," I answered.

"Mother says she's always been wanting to find a boy to suit her."

Peaty looked as if he couldn't move. There was a little low whimper again outside the door. There was something else too. There was a sound of a breaking plant pot on the floor. I couldn't seem to understand what had happened. Peaty stood there looking down at it, and the white chrysanthemums were all broken in the dirt at his feet. I don't know what I said. I don't believe I said anything. I looked at Peaty and there didn't seem to be any sound at all. He was very white. But he turned round and walked back to the east window. Then he started across the room with another plant pot in his hand and stopped again, in the middle of the room. It seemed as if I couldn't speak if I wanted to. I just sat there watching. Peaty started to go on and then he stopped. There was another sound of something falling—kind of sharp and short, and another pot of white chrysanthemums was all broken on the floor.

He turned round again to the east window, and I guess I reached out my hand. It was as if I must stop him and yet *I couldn't seem to move.* He was in the middle of the room again with the last plant pot in his hand, and there were steps in the hall.

Mrs. Merritt stood there in the doorway.

I remember hearing the wind rattling the blinds and that same little low whimper outside the door—and then the last pot of white chrysanthemums seemed to drop down very slowly, with a soft, broken sound beside the others, and that was all.

We were all three standing there without speaking. I think Mrs. Merritt moved first, and she came into the room and stood for a minute beside Peaty and the broken plant pots. She looked as if she couldn't believe it and didn't know what to say.

"Can you give me any—reason for it?" she asked, after what seemed like a long time.

Peaty looked right at her. She must have noticed how white he was. He shook his head

and his chin shook just a little, too, the way it does once in a great while.

"I asked you especially to be careful," she said. "I don't pretend to understand it."

She turned away as if she didn't, and that was all there was to it. I began to say something but Peaty was looking at me and I stopped.

"I think I won't ask you to do anything more," Mrs. Merritt said. "You don't seem to be a very safe helper."

Peaty reached out to get his cap.

"How much shall I pay you for the paths?" she asked.

Peaty only shook his head and moved away to the door. As he went down the hall I saw him brush his arm up across his face. And then the front door opened and closed again. And I remembered where I was. I think I started to go out into the hall myself, but as I passed the east window Mrs. Merritt reached out and put her hand on my shoulder and looked down at me.

"What does it mean?" she said. "Is he sick? What *is* it?"

I looked up at her. I knew the reason he had dropped the plant pots, and I knew he didn't want to have me tell.

"Is he?" she repeated.

"Yes he is!" I said. "Mother says he isn't half nourished and he isn't half clothed and he isn't taken care of by anybody at all! She says she never saw anybody quite so neglected!" I said, and I guess I was so kind of excited, my voice was a little queer and shaky, too.

Mrs. Merritt kept on looking down at me with her hand on my shoulder.

"I must look into it," she whispered, after a while, as if she was only saying it to herself. And then she turned her head to the window.

Peaty and Peat were going down the path to the sidewalk.

When they came to the gate, Peaty turned round and looked back, and then he stopped. The wind was blowing worse than ever, and it was as if he didn't really like to go away.

The fire was burning just the same and I think he could see the red lights on the door. I suppose it felt colder than ever to him after being inside so long. Anyway he stood there in the snow, with the wind kind of flapping his clothes around him, and looked back.

Peat waited until he began to get a little nervous and then he put up his nose and gave a little lick at Peaty's hand. Peaty didn't say anything, but it seemed to make him remember. Because he turned round very slowly and drew his shoulders up tight, as if he was trying to keep out the cold the best he could, and then he reached out his hand for Peat.

The snow blew in their faces as they started to go on, and you could see Peaty put his head down, and Peat kind of huddle up to him as if it was better to keep as near to each other as they could.

I could hear the Angora cat beside the fire purring to herself—and we watched them as they went down the walk together.

CHAPTER X

THE BIG FAMILY

AFTER the day of the big snowstorm and the time that we had down at Mrs. Merritt's, I got to thinking about the kind of mother or father you would really like to have, if you were going to be adopted. Of course you can see from this book which is about my own father and mother and a few others that I have met—especially mothers—that if

I was going to be adopted myself, it would be a little hard to know what to say. But something happened after the snowstorm that made me feel better about it.

First there came a big thaw, and one warm day right after another, till it seemed to dry up, and there came a day when it was so warm that it seemed just exactly like spring. It was only the first week in March, but you would have said that it was April or May from the way things looked and felt.

We were having a half-holiday at school, on account of a convention they were having, and I guess it was about two o'clock in the afternoon when I put on my thin overcoat and went out doors. It was so lovely and warm it was nice just to be out there, and it seemed a little early for it, but there was a robin flying from the big elm to the sycamore. I stood there watching him for a minute, and then I heard Peaty's voice just behind me. He was asking if I had seen anything of Peat. He said he hadn't been home since morning.

I told him, why no, I hadn't seen him all day. And Peaty looked a little worried and said he was going to look for him. I said I'd go with him.

The robin up in the sycamore was chirping now, and the sun shone right down on him so that you could see his red breast very plainly. I pointed him out to Peaty and told him that he ought to wish.

But just as I said it the robin flew away.

We started off down the sidewalk, and of course Peaty kept looking all the way, and once in a while he would stop and ask people if they had seen anything of a dog. That was a good deal for Peaty, but he wanted to find Peat so much that I guess that was all he thought of. When he went up and began ringing at a doorbell though, I was a good deal surprised, and when he told me he guessed he would begin looking round in back yards a little, I was more surprised than ever. But we had just come to Mrs. Hewitt's house then and I happened to know her quite well so I

thought that would be a good one to start on.

Well, we went in and of course Peat wasn't there, so we went through to the next yard and he wasn't there either. But Peaty stopped all of a sudden and listened, as if he heard something, too.

"That's Peat," he said. "I know where he is."

He pointed to a fence and we were over it in about a second and then we stopped again.

We heard voices and laughing as if there were children quite near playing something, too, and Peaty pointed to a fence. We were over it in about a second and there we were. And there the children were, and there Peat was, too! I wish you could have seen him when he saw Peaty. He looked kind of ashamed for a minute as if he didn't know just what to do, and then he began jumping and throwing kisses up at him, as if he would really like to eat him up. And Peaty was so glad that his face turned pinkish for a minute and

then he said, "Get down Peat," and we both stopped and looked round a little.

Well, when we saw just the way it was, I really didn't blame Peat much for wanting to stay there.

It was a very big yard that we were in and the sun was shining down on it very warm. And as you looked round it seemed to be all full of children. There weren't quite so many as there looked to be at the first glance, because when I counted I found there were only five. They were all running round and I suppose that made them look like more. But when they saw us they stopped, and we could see that they were all of them quite small. There was a boy about Peaty's size and another one about a size smaller I should say, and there were two more, still smaller, that looked so much alike it confused you to look at them, and there was the littlest of all and he was so small that he was really not much of any size at all.

They looked at us for a minute and then

they went right on playing just the same as before, and Peat began to join right in, too. It was easy to see that that was the way he had been spending the day because he acted as if he was perfectly at home. They all acted that way, too, and I was just thinking they must all belong to the same family when a lady looked out the door and then she came down the steps and into the yard. She was all dressed up to go out and she came walking through the yard smiling.

"Take good care of Donny, won't you Nathaniel?" she said. "I'm going to be away for about an hour."

By Donny I could see she meant the baby. The one that wasn't much of any size at all.

She leaned down and buttoned up Nathaniel's coat a little closer as she spoke, and he looked up and nodded his head. She took his face between her hands and kissed him good-by, and then she looked round for the rest.

"Good-by, Buddie," she said, and she took the one a size smaller and did the same. "Good-

by Twinnies," she said, and she took the two that looked so much alike they confused you and did the same. "Good-by Old Comfort," she said, and she took the one that wasn't much of any size at all right up in her arms, and kissed him till he wiggled and laughed at the same time, and then she put him down and started off.

"Now don't let anything happen to him," she said, and she smiled back and threw some more kisses, and they all ran across the yard after her, as if they didn't like to see her go. So they stood there just at the corner of the house waving all their hands at her, and she was laughing back at them and doing the same, all the way out to the sidewalk.

They turned round and went running back again as soon as she was out of sight, and the next you knew they were all playing tag and Peaty and I were joining right in, too. Peat was lying down and taking a little rest in the sun by the porch now, and Nathaniel came so near catching me that I almost stepped on him.

But I caught hold of a tall empty box, something like a chest, that was standing there on one end, and saved myself. It wiggled so when I caught it that I was afraid it was going to fall over on me and I looked up to see what it was. It looked a good deal like the same thing mother called her bridal chest, and as I said, they had it standing up on one end. I think they thought it was so nice and summery they would air it. While I stood there a bird flew by and lighted on it just over my head. It looked like the same robin that we saw on the sycamore at home. The sun had come out so bright that it seemed to be smiling all over the yard, and I think that was the reason that it came. I glanced up and the robin glanced down from the bridal chest at the children playing everywhere, and then it started in on a little, low song.

"You better wish!" I called to them all, and they all looked up too, and the baby started across the yard so quick it tripped and fell down. Nathaniel picked him up and brushed

him off though, and he didn't seem to mind much either. Because just as soon as he got a chance he went walking right off across the yard again, but this time toward the seesaw.

Of course he was very small but he sat down on one end, as if he knew just how to do it, and Nathaniel kind of laughed at him and began climbing up the other end. The trouble was he climbed too far and the seesaw went way down on Nathaniel's end. That wasn't quite all either. It went way up on the baby's end. I think we all just stood there looking. And the robin had stopped singing. It looked as if the baby was up very near the sky. It leaned way over so that it was nothing but a little bunch holding on there, and it made a kind of little, short squeal as if it was really too scared to do anything else. The worst of it was Nathaniel was more scared than the baby. And he did the wrong thing. He jumped off the seesaw as if he must get over there on the baby's side and get him down *somehow,* anyway. You probably know what happened.

The baby came down very quick. I was almost too scared to look. I must have though, because I saw Nathaniel over there leaning down by it and trying to pick it up. And I guess we must have all got over there some way, too, because next you knew everybody was brushing and patting at the baby, and what do you suppose, after it had cried quite loud for about a minute, it got up and started right off across the yard again, as if anything like that wasn't really worth mentioning, after all.

Well, they decided to start a new game and have him for little Sallie Water sitting in a saucer. I guess they thought the saucer would be safer for him than the seesaw. And he seemed to enjoy it more, himself.

I think it would have been really better to keep him for little Sallie Water sitting in the saucer till his mother got back. But of course they got tired of it pretty soon, and before long they decided they would rather change and play Football.

Of course the baby was a little young for that and they didn't have a football either. But they said Buddie's cap was just right for it, and it was easy to see that the baby wasn't going to stop doing anything on account of his size, if he could help it.

Nathaniel looked a little worried about it. He said the smallest thing was Quarterback, and he seemed to know, but he didn't believe the baby would be very good at that, either. Because besides his size, you had to understand a little about the game to be a good Quarterback.

But the baby showed very plainly that he was willing to try it, anyway, and they decided perhaps they would give him the chance, after all. Well, I think it would have been better if they had said, no, and stuck to it. Because maybe a small one would do for Quarterback, but the baby was really too small. The very first thing that happened was, he got tipped over, and the next thing was, they all of them tipped over on top of him. Of course you

have to be prepared for that, when you play Football, but from the way the baby looked, I don't think he was prepared at all, and I think he was a little mad about it, too. He didn't get up right off and Nathaniel said they would have to call Time. When he said that, the baby put his fist in his eyes and began to cry. It was only for a minute though, and then he got up and walked right off as if it didn't amount to so very much after all. Of course he didn't understand very well that if he was going to be Quarterback he would have to stay in the game. So they called him back and he didn't make the least fuss about it, and the next you knew they were all down in the heap again and pushing, too.

Well, the baby's size was what was against him, I guess. Anyway, they got too near the steps that led into the basement, and to make it worse the baby started rolling down the steps. To make it just a little worse there was a pail of water standing there, and of course it tipped over on him and got him quite wet. I

guess that was when Nathaniel decided that Football wasn't a very good game for the baby. They all seemed to agree to it, too, and they carried him up on the grass and put him down in a very warm, sunny spot to dry. And they said they would change the game and have him for the May Queen.

So they made a circle and the baby liked the change. You could tell from his expression. And if it hadn't been for the robin it never would have happened the way it did. But the robin came back. That wasn't all. It lighted on the bridal chest again, and it looked down at them, going round in the circle and singing, with the baby in the center for the May Queen, and the sun was smiling so lovely and warm and the grass looked so nice and dry that what do you suppose? Why, the robin just flew right down into the circle and stood there for a second, right beside the baby. Then he flew away again. That was when the real trouble started. Because the robin flew away again, and not only that but the baby

started right up, as if perhaps he expected to catch it.

In another minute everybody seemed to be running after the robin. They went right round the corner of the house, but it had gone and they came back again. They looked round and the queer thing about it was the baby seemed to have gone, too.

"Where's the baby?" Nathaniel said, and they all looked around again. As I have said the baby seemed to have gone, too.

"Well, where is he?" Nathaniel said. "He was here just a second ago."

They ran round the corner of the house again and looked way out to the sidewalk. Of course he wouldn't have had time to get out to the sidewalk, but the queer thing was, he wasn't in the yard and he wasn't anywhere in sight. He didn't really seem to be anywhere at all. It was as if he was right there, and then he wasn't there.

Nathaniel glanced up at the sky. I don't think he really thought the baby had flown up

in the sky. But he was so confused he didn't know *what* to think.

At that very minute someone came round the corner of the house. It was their mother.

Well, I guess it was a good thing she came right then when she did. You would have thought so from the way they acted anyway, and she leaned over and gave them a kind of a hug all round, and then she looked up and then she looked down as if that wasn't quite all either.

"Why, where's Donny?" she said.

Nobody answered for a minute. I guess it was because nobody knew what to say.

"He just went—somewhere," Nathaniel said, after a while, with his voice rather small. "He went after the robin."

"After the robin!" she repeated. "What do you mean Nathaniel? *Where is he?"*

She didn't say any more and he didn't answer. Because just at that minute there came a strange, little sound. She looked round her very quick. It was like a little, small cry.

"Where is it?" she said. *"Where is he?"*

It came again. Just the little, small cry.

She started round the corner of the house as fast as she could and they all started after her. They stopped and listened without anybody speaking a single word. It was very still. They waited a second more and then they all came back again.

"Hark!" she whispered very sharply.

It came again, the little, small cry. It seemed to be *right there where we were.*

She looked up at the trees and down at the grass and her eyes were all queer and frightened looking.

"Wait just a minute! Wait just a minute, Donny!" she called. "Mother's here! *Where are you?"*

We were listening so hard we didn't really dare to breathe. But we heard it, the little cry—kind of smothered. You wouldn't believe it, but it sounded something as if it came right out of the ground there where we stood.

She was getting very white.

"Where are you Donny?" she called again, with her voice a little shaking.

The sound that came back was so small we could hardly hear it at all.

"Tell mother! Where are you Donny!" she called again. But that time we couldn't hear a single thing.

"Look children!" she whispered. *"Look everywhere!"*

She ran to the basement steps and down to the door. But it was locked tight when she tried it, and she ran back again and tried to look under the porch. It was all boarded up so of course he couldn't have been in there, but it was as if she had to do *something* anyway. Everybody else was running around the yard without really doing anything, and I saw her put her hand up to her head as if she couldn't even think.

Just at that minute I happened to notice that Peat was snuffing and scratching at the ground on the other side of the yard as if there was a rat or something there, and I called him.

He didn't pay any attention to me, but Peaty's voice sounded very quick just behind me.

"Come here, Peat!" he said.

But Peat didn't come then, either. He kept on scratching and nosing at the ground as much as to say, he was busy, thank you, and Peaty ran over there and took him by the collar.

"Where is he, Peat?" he whispered quick and sharp. *"Find him, Peat! Get him, Peat!"*

Peat pricked up his ears so that they straightened right out and you ought to have seen him start in scratching up the ground then! He was right up close to the bridal chest. And from the way he acted you would have thought he was going to find the baby if he had to dig to China. There was just one thing that I hadn't noticed though, and nobody else had noticed it either. And that was that Peat was scratching his hole through and *under* one edge of the bridal chest. Because it had tipped over and the cover was lying right out flat with the ground.

I put my ear way down and I called something.

It came back very faint—but I could hear it, too. It was the little, small cry.

I jumped up so quick I hit my head but I didn't care.

"He's here!" I hollered. *"Peat's found him! Come! Quick! He's—here!"*

I wish you could have seen the way they came across that yard.

"Where?" all the children were calling. *"Where? Where?"* their mother was calling.

And Peat snorted something like a steam engine, and went to work so fast that grass and dirt were flying up in everybody's eyes and faces. They understood though.

"Go it there, Peat!" Peaty whispered, getting kind of pinkish all over his face. *"Good work, Peat! Go it there!"*

Just then I happened to see the face of the baby's mother. It didn't turn pink like Peaty's. It was whiter than it had ever been

before. But she leaned way down and braced her hands against the bridal chest.

Well, Peat turned round with the worst growl you ever heard yet, and he snapped at her, too. It was as much as to say, who was doing this, he would like to know?

She stepped back a little, from surprise, I guess, and he started in again, till the grass and dirt were flying so you could hardly see. He was growling and snorting, too, as if perhaps he would advise anybody not to interfere. I saw that he was getting quite a good-sized hole right under the edge of the bridal chest. The baby's mother was straining forward very still.

"*Donny!*" her voice came, almost like a cry. The hole was big now. But I don't think she was really prepared for what happened either.

"*Here I is!*" came the answer, and it sounded so clear and plain that Peat jumped back as if perhaps he was a little surprised, himself. Then he looked up as much as to say,

well, he was satisfied, do what you please now.

And the baby's mother—you wouldn't have supposed she was so strong. But she braced herself again and she turned over the bridal chest very slowly and carefully, and as if she didn't dare breathe either, and it dropped back softly on the ground. She made a little sound then, something like a small, soft scream. The baby was there. You couldn't blame her. He was there all curled up in the queerest little heap you ever saw, and yet trying to reach his hands up to her, too.

But she had her arms around him, and she was lifting him right up and they were both of them making little sounds something like crying, and yet not crying either, and he had his arms so tight round her neck that you couldn't see his face at all. But you could see his feet wiggle, and I think it was just because he was so glad that he wasn't shut up there all alone in the dark any more, but was out there where the sun was shining, with his mother.

And we knew then that he wasn't hurt at all.

I think it must have been quite a long while afterwards that I saw Nathaniel and the others trying to tip the bridal chest up on one end again. It was hard to make it stand up, on account of the ground being so uneven, and then I remembered how they had all gone rushing past it when they chased the robin. I think the baby was remembering that, too, because he still had his arms round his mother, as if perhaps it was safer that way, and she sat on one end of the seesaw, giving him little pats and looking at the others.

"It was when they were chasing the robin," I said, and she looked at me very close with her eyes, as if perhaps now she was going to understand it a little better.

"It must have tipped over when he went by it," I said. "It tipped over, and it was so deep and long and he was so little and short that it just covered him right up."

She held him a little closer for a minute, and

then she looked up and held out her hand to the others. Nathaniel looked white as he came across the yard.

"There—you're only a very little boy yourself," she said, putting her arm round him. "Now cheer right up, Lovey. Nobody's blaming you for anything at all. If I can't take care of my own children it certainly isn't *your* fault."

Nathaniel looked as if he might cry, if he didn't look out for himself, and she kept one arm round him, and they all came crowding round beside her, on the seesaw. Of course I was standing there, just at one side, and so was Peaty. The only one that seemed to be off at any distance was Peat, and he sat about in the middle of the yard and looked at us. It seemed to come over her again that he was really the one that found the baby.

"Well—who was the old hero! Who was the nice boy!" she said, holding out her hand. And Peat wiggled his ears a little and turned

round as much as to say, "Oh, don't mention it," and Peaty started across the yard.

"Oh, make him come here," she said. "He's an old wonder, that's what he is. I only wish I could have him to keep."

Peaty turned round very quick. He heard what she said, and so did Peat. I could tell from the way they both acted, especially Peaty. He looked down at Peat, then he looked back at her with all the children sitting round her, on the seesaw. And last of all he looked about the sunny yard.

"She says she'd—like to keep you Peat," he said very low. And Peat did the same thing that Peaty had done. He looked back at her, sitting there with her arms around the children, and then he looked round the sunny yard. I guess perhaps Peat was thinking of the way it was at home. I am sure Peaty was. Because he leaned over and whispered something. I could tell from his lips what it was.

"You'd better stay Peat," he said. "It's—nicer here."

He stood there just a minute, with his head down a little—and then he turned round to go away. But his lips moved again.

"You'd better stay Peat," he whispered. He took a few steps and stopped, and then he came back as if perhaps he wanted to say something more. Peat looked up, and Peaty stood there for a minute and then he put his hand down, and gave him just one little pat. I think it was meant for good-by, because he turned round again and walked off.

But Peat still sat there in the middle of the yard. And just as Peaty came to the corner of the house he looked back.

All of a sudden I remembered about that morning at Mrs. Merritt's. It seemed as if it was the other way round now. I wondered if Peat was remembering about it, too. He turned his head, as if he was taking his time about it, and looked at Peaty. From way across the yard I could see Peaty try to smile back at him and then he gave a little wave with

his hand. It was meant for good-by, and we just waited without speaking to see what Peat would do. He seemed to be putting his mind right on it—and all of a sudden he gave a kind of bound into the air, and he started for the corner of the house.

"Lie down, Peat!" Peaty cried, with his voice all hoarse and queer. *"Stay where you are! Lie down!"*

I wish you could have heard the bark Peat answered with. And he was across the yard in about a second. He gave one jump at Peaty, as if perhaps he would like to eat him up, if he had more time, and then he looked back, as much as to say, "No I thank you, who's managing this thing, anyway?"

I could see Peaty's face turn pink. And his hand reached down and felt at Peat's collar. It was as if he didn't know quite what to do.

But Peat was in a hurry to start. He gave a little pull and Peaty seemed to hesitate a minute longer, so he gave another little pull.

"'*Lie down, Peat!*' Peaty cried."

It was stronger this time and I guess Peaty thought if that was the way he felt about it, why, he wouldn't stop and argue it with him.

So they went round the corner together, as if perhaps it was better not to put it off any longer.

I started to follow them. The baby was still sitting in its mother's lap.

"Why do you go?" she said.

The sun was getting lower, but it came through the trees so that it seemed to drop right across her face. It made it look all lighted up and sunny, as you looked back, and it made the faces of the children look that way too. A bird flew past them just then and in another minute I saw that the robin was up there on the bridal chest. It began a little, low song and they all looked up with the sun on their faces. I said good-by, but they were still looking up and listening, so I started off as softly as I could and went across the yard and round the corner, and left them.

I could see Peaty and Peat just turning on to the sidewalk. Peat was giving little jumps, and Peaty was reaching out his hand and looking down at him, just as if he was so glad that he was there that he had forgotten about the big family in the sunny yard and everything else. I wonder if he really had.

CHAPTER XI

PEATY'S REAL FATHER AND MOTHER

I WAS going over the children in school the other day, and it is queer but Peaty is the only one there without a sign of a mother or father. Some of them have only one. That is, Frankie Dabney's father is

dead, so he has only one, and that is his mother, and Newton Connors has only one, and that is his father. But Peaty hasn't either one or the other. Mother says they have both been dead ever since Peaty was a little tiny baby. That is one reason I was so surprised at what happened that day Peaty and I went out to Brier Farm Meadows to pick dogtooth violets.

You see it was the thirtieth of April. That was really the reason we went, because it was the day before May day and we wanted some flowers.

So just as soon as school was over, Peaty and I started for Brier Farm Meadows. We didn't say anything to any of the other boys about it, because if we did, next we knew everybody in school would be going, and we didn't want them picking ahead of us. There wouldn't be enough for that, anyway.

Well, it is only about a mile and a half over there, and we got there a little after four. The meadows were just yellow with dogtooth violets. We picked and we picked till we both

had a big bunch, and then it was so lovely and warm we went over and sat down on the edge of the brook that flowed along there through the meadow, and dangled our feet just over the water.

We wanted to take off our shoes and stockings worse than anything we could think of, but of course it was only April and we didn't quite dare.

We sat there quite a little while though, dangling our feet to see how near we could make them touch the water, without really doing it. The trouble was, I went a little too far and then I pulled back in a hurry and made it worse, and the next I knew I was in way over the top of my boot and my foot was just sopping wet.

Peaty looked scared when he saw it.

"What do you suppose your mother'll say?" he asked me.

"Oh, I guess she won't say much," I answered. And then I began taking off my boot. I thought I would dry it in the sun.

Peaty didn't say anything for a minute. He watched me taking off my boot and then he spoke again.

"My mother wouldn't either," he said. "She wouldn't have cared if I'd got my foot wet."

Of course I was surprised to have him say that, because to start with, he didn't have any mother, and I knew, too, that she died when he was a little tiny baby, so you see he couldn't possibly remember whether she would care or not, about his feet, I mean.

"Wouldn't she?" I said.

"No," he said, "no, *she* wouldn't have cared. *She* wouldn't have done anything to me if I'd wet my foot."

I was almost sure he was thinking of his aunt and the way she would have probably acted, and I couldn't help wondering what he would say next. Of course he is small and narrow through, but he got up now and looked off past me as if he felt quite large.

"No, *she* wouldn't have cared!" he said again.

"If you told her you couldn't help it, I guess she wouldn't have done anything," I said.

"No," Peaty joined right in, before I could say anything more. "She'd of just given me some dry ones."

He glanced down at his feet then. His shoes were all scuffed up and ragged looking, and I suppose that was the reason his voice sounded rather small when he spoke again.

"They'd of been real nice shoes I guess," he said.

"I suppose anybody keeps you more dressed up if they're your mother," I answered, and Peaty looked up and down the suit he had on. It used to be black and white, kind of a real small mixture I think, but he had worn it so long there wasn't much black left on it or white either. It looked more like a plain, dirty slate than anything, and Peaty kept on looking down at it. Pretty soon he held his head up again and looked off past me.

"I guess maybe she'd of had me wear a blue sailor for every day," he said.

"I suppose your father would have to *buy* your clothes for you," I said after a while. "Would he have bought—most anything like that?"

"Oh ye—es," Peaty answered. "Why he would of bought me—most anything like that!"

It couldn't be that Peaty remembered his father, and yet it looked as if he did, too. Because he stood there looking right past me at the meadow, where the dogtooth violets were, and his face seemed to get all bright looking, something as if there were little lights all round his eyes.

"That was just the way he was," he said.

I began to put my shoe on now. It squeaked, but it was getting dry, too, and I picked up my flowers from the grass. They were beginning to look kind of droopy.

"It's most five o'clock, Peaty," I said. "I suppose we have to be starting home, don't we?"

And Peaty turned round real slow and then

he looked down at the bunch of droopy flowers on the grass.

"I suppose we do," he said.

We didn't talk so very much on the way home, but just as we turned the corner to go up our street Peaty began to walk pretty fast.

"I guess we better hurry," he said.

I knew he was thinking of his aunt and beginning to be afraid. He went in alone though, when he got to the gate, so of course I didn't know anything that happened, but when I saw Peaty next day, I asked him if she cared.

"Not much," he answered, but he acted as if he really didn't want to talk about it, either. He always acts that way when anybody speaks about her.

Well, that was the day that my new pony came, and of course there couldn't anybody think of anything else. I couldn't, anyway, and most of the boys seemed to feel about the same way. They all seemed to want to be

round talking to me every chance they could get, too. And Parker Gaybud rode his velocipede to school and kept asking me at recess if I didn't want to ride it.

"You can ride it home if you want to," he said. "You're going to give me a ride on your pony, after school, aren't you Felix?" he asked.

Then they would all begin asking, one right after the other.

"You're going to give me a ride, aren't you Felix? You're going to give me a ride, aren't you Felix?" just like that.

Well, I told them I couldn't give them all a ride at the same time, but when I started home, after school that afternoon, it seemed as if most every boy I ever knew was coming along with me. There were eight or nine of them anyway. Peaty was there, too. But Peaty wasn't doing quite so much talking as the rest. But before we had gone very far Peaty got to talking, too. It was when we were going by the new library that they are building on Main

Street. There were four of us that were a little ahead of the others. They were Parker Gaybud and Lawrence Royce and Peaty and myself. Parker Gaybud's father is quite rich and he gave a lot of money for the new library. Well, as we came past it that afternoon, Parker began telling about his father. He said he guessed there wouldn't have been any new library if it hadn't been for his giving the money, and was talking along like that till everybody got kind of tired of it.

My father is Mayor, as everybody knows, so I began telling them how he had to say where they could build it before they could start it, and they couldn't have started it at all if it hadn't been for him.

Parker didn't have so much to say about that, but Lawrence joined right in then.

"Well, my father was a soldier," he said, and we knew that was true too, because he was shot dead in the Spanish War.

"Your father didn't go to war, Felix, did he?" he asked.

Of course I couldn't say yes, to that, because he didn't. But Peaty spoke then, so I didn't have the chance, anyway.

"My father went to war, my father was a soldier too," he said.

They didn't pay very much attention, and I don't think any of them had ever heard anything about Peaty's father anyway. I was looking at him to see what he was going to say next.

"Was your father a soldier, Peaty?" I asked him.

"Ye—es," Peaty answered, dragging it out till it sounded quite long and big. "I guess he was about the bravest one there was anywhere round."

He was looking off, the way he did the afternoon we picked the dogtooth violets, and it seemed as if there were something the same kind of little lights around his eyes, too. Pretty soon he spoke again.

"He wore straps on his shoulders," he said.

Well, we were getting near home now, and

before long everybody was talking about the pony again, instead of about their fathers. And when they saw her tied, right there by the house, with her saddle all on, well, it was all I could do to manage them at all. From the way they acted, I could see that I would have to give all of them a ride. And by the time they had each had a turn at it, it was quite late. Peaty came last. He could be more patient than the others and it was almost five o'clock when it came Peaty's turn. The others had got started for home then and Peaty was just standing there by the pony ready to climb up, and I had hold of the bridle when mother opened the door and stood looking at us. She had on a new dress, long and pinkish, and her cheeks and neck and arms all looked something the same color, too.

"Come in when the clock strikes five, Felix," she said, "and I want you to put your white linen suit on to-night. You'll find it all ready on the bed. Sarah'll help you about getting dressed."

She shut the door and went in again, and Peaty stood there looking at the door. He looked so small beside the pony that I wondered if he could manage to climb up alone. He isn't so very strong about things like that. But he seemed to have forgotten about the pony, for a minute, anyway. He stood there looking at the door where mother had been. Then he glanced down at his clothes. It was the same suit that used to be a black and white mixture, but was worn more like a plain, dirty slate.

Pretty soon he spoke.

"I guess my mother would of had me dress up sometimes, too," he said.

And then I told him to go ahead and jump up. But Peaty just stood there looking at the door where mother had been standing.

"I guess she would of most always worn—" he began, but someone called right then, and he stopped.

It was his aunt and she was standing behind our back fence. We could just see her from

where we were, and she was waving and beckoning to Peaty with her arm.

Peaty didn't say another word. He just started for home without even glancing back. He didn't even finish telling what his mother would wear, and he didn't get his ride either. It was too bad he didn't get his ride, and as he went hurrying down to the back fence where his aunt was, I called after him.

"Come over to-morrow and you can have a ride, Peaty," I said.

I guess it would have been better if I hadn't said it.

Well, the next day was the day the pony-cart came. Father said he got it mostly on account of Luly. Of course she is only six, but father said Daniel could take her out in it most any time. He is the man that works for us very often, and he thinks everything of Luly. When the pony-cart came, he said she just jumped up and down she was so glad. I was at school, myself, but I came home as quick as I could, and the only ones that got

there as soon as I did were Lawrence Royce and Peaty. Peat came over for just a minute, but he didn't like the looks of Lawrence Royce and he went back home. Most of the boys were kept after school. As it turned out, it was just as well.

When we got there, mother was just going into the house with some daffodils she had picked. But she stopped a minute when she saw me and brushed some dirt off my cap and kind of twisted it a little straighter, and then she turned to go up the walk.

"Oh, the pony-cart's come, Felix," she said, looking back. "Daniel's just giving Luly a little drive now." And then she went up the steps. Well, it seemed as if I couldn't wait. But Harry Paine and Jo Seaver came running up the sidewalk then, and they began telling as fast as they could about Mr. Cutler, the grocer, stopping a dog fight. It was an awful fight, they said, when they got into the yard, and Mr. Cutler was bitten in the hand. But Harry said they were all talking to him and

telling him it was the great way he did it, and all that.

"Would you stop a dog fight, Felix?" he asked. "One like that I mean, where it looks as if they'd most kill you?"

I told him I didn't know, but maybe I could.

"I bet I could if I could do it before they'd got going very far," he said. "I bet my father could, anyway."

"I bet my father could, too," Jo Seaver said. "He could stop one just as easy as anything."

Peaty had only been listening so far, but when Jo said that, he joined right in, as quick as anybody.

"I bet my father could, too," he said. "My father wasn't afraid of anything like that."

"Would he have jumped right into it, if he'd thought it would kill him?" Harry asked.

"Why, yes," Peaty answered, "he wouldn't stop for anything like that!"

"Would he have jumped right in if there were fifteen or sixteen fighting?" Harry asked.

Peaty was looking off down the road, but he turned round just as quick as he could and looked at us instead.

"He wasn't afraid of anything!" he said, with those same little lights coming round his eyes. "There couldn't anything—make him afraid," he said, with his voice coming more slow again. "Everybody knew—there couldn't."

"I guess there'd be some things he'd be afraid of," Harry said. "I guess he'd be afraid of a fight of about two million dogs and about a million cats."

"No he wouldn't," Peaty answered. "He wouldn't be afraid of *anything!*" And Peaty stood up so straight and tall it didn't look much like him, either. "He wouldn't care—if it killed him!"

But Peaty stopped. He seemed to see something coming up the road. Harry Paine saw it too.

"Look!" he hollered, jumping up. "Look at what's coming! Look! It's your pony, Fe-

lix! It's—it's a runaway! Look! Felix! It's your little sister!"

I couldn't seem to tell what he was talking about. I couldn't seem to see straight. But I knew what it was. It was the pony—running away—and *Luly was all alone in the pony-cart.*

I don't know how mother knew, or how she got out there, but I heard something like a strange sound right there beside me, and she was standing there. Her face was so white it didn't look like mother at all, and she was staring right ahead and her hand was kind of feeling at her throat, the way it does when she is terribly frightened.

I don't really know what I did. But I think I got hold of mother's skirt. She was trying to get out there into the road and I was trying to drag her back. She gave something like a cry and tried to pull herself away from me, and then she stopped. It seemed almost as if she had stopped breathing, too. It seemed almost as if everybody had.

Peaty was out there in the road. He was standing there ready to jump.

And the pony was coming—all white and foaming looking at the mouth, and sluing the cart round so that it looked every minute as if it would go over, and Luly was huddled up all alone inside.

There didn't anybody make a sound. Peaty was going to be killed if he didn't move, because it was coming right onto him. I could feel mother's fingers on my arm. And then Peaty jumped for the bridle. He didn't catch it, and the pony slued off to one side and Peaty jumped again. He didn't catch it then either, and the pony slued off again. And then Peaty caught it. But the pony went right on. Peaty was hanging by the bridle but the pony went right on.

I could hear queer breathing sounds from mother, and her fingers dug into my arm so hard it hurt me. Then all in a minute she cried out, as if she couldn't breathe at all. Peaty had lost his hold and was way down there on

"Then Peaty jumped for the bridle."

the ground. He seemed to be in the way and it stopped the pony a little, but she went on too. She went right on over Peaty, and then she slued off again and the cart went over.

Mother dragged herself away from me then, and it wouldn't have made any difference what anybody did, she was out there in the road.

Then the strange thing happened. Luly was up, Luly was up and she *was running into mother's arms.* She was crying, because she was so frightened, but she was running into mother's arms—and she wasn't hurt.

But it was different with Peaty. He was lying there beside the road, and there were people coming running from all different ways at once. Some of them began crowding round mother and Luly, and some of them began crowding round Peaty. He didn't move at all. And everyone who was there around him seemed to get very quiet. Pretty soon a man lifted him right up in his arms.

"Where does he live," he said.

I told him and he started home with Peaty in his arms.

"He's living," I heard the man say very low. . . .

But they thought he was going to die. They thought so all night. And in the morning, mother told me that they were afraid Peaty wasn't going to get well.

She was over at his house almost all day. Sarah kept Luly upstairs and Daniel was around, looking as if he didn't know what to do next. He kept telling me how he just stepped out of the cart a minute to fix the harness when the pony got frightened at something and started to run. If Luly had been hurt I don't know what he would have done.

It was almost seven o'clock in the evening when mother came home from Peaty's. She had been there ever since about three in the afternoon.

"How is he?" father asked. Father was standing at the door watching her as she came up the walk.

"A very little better," mother answered.

"How's the woman behaving?" father said then. He meant Peaty's aunt.

"You'd think she was broken-hearted about it," mother answered. "That's what you would expect, I suppose. Her services aren't much in demand, though. The nurse and doctor seem capable of running things themselves. And they're working hard," mother said, breathing something like a sigh.

I caught a glimpse of Peat that evening and I wish you could have seen the way he looked! You see he wasn't there when it happened. That was it. He thought if he had been there it would have been different. And they wouldn't let him go upstairs either. I guess it was about as hard for Peat as it was for anybody.

It was the next morning that mother told me that if nothing happened Peaty would get well. She looked pale, I thought. She had looked that way ever since he was hurt. And she kept going over there that day, al-

most as much as ever. She seems to feel so different about Peaty. She can hardly talk about him without her eyes getting wet, so that she has to brush away some tears, and I heard her telling father this morning that she is going to do something for him when he gets better. Perhaps she will take him away from his aunt. I wonder. I heard her telling father something else, too.

She said the first time Peaty opened his eyes after it happened, it was sometime in the middle of the night. She was standing right there over the bed, and he tried to say something and mother leaned down to hear it. She said it was so faint and small she had to lean down very close, but this was it.

"My father—wouldn't—of been afraid!" Peaty whispered.

And then he shut his eyes and went to sleep again.

Mother cried when she told father that, and I think I know why. Because she said something else to him quite low. But I heard it. I

wouldn't ever tell anybody, but I guess I will have to write it, too, because I am trying to write everything just the way it really is.

Peaty's father was a drunkard and his mother had to have help from charity.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST PLACE

WELL, I guess I am almost through the book. And Peaty is getting well again. I will tell you about it.

As soon as he was strong enough, mother had him come over and sit in the steamer chair on our upstairs porch. Sometimes, when it was sunny and warm, he would sit there almost

all day. Mother had pictures for him to look at and little puzzles for him to do, and she would go out there quite often to talk and see how he was getting on. She said she wanted to keep him cheered up.

But after he had been on the porch like that for about a week or two, they decided he could really go out doors. I remember the first morning he and I went off together. Mother stood on the steps and watched us go down the walk.

"Don't go far," she said. "And take good care of him, Felix."

I told her yes, and we went along down the sidewalk together with Peat on the side next to Peaty. I think he thought he could keep better watch of him that way.

It was towards the end of May and the trees were all green again, and the birds were singing so loud that we kept stopping to look up. Once, when we stopped, a robin fluttered right near our heads, and then it flew up and lighted on a branch. It seemed to remind us both of

something, but I think I was the first one that spoke about it.

"Do you suppose those children are playing there just the same in the big yard?" I said.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Peaty answered.

"Let's go and see," I said.

We went along without saying anything more. But when we came to Mrs. Hewitt's house he stopped.

"I don't believe I could climb the fence," he said.

"Well, you don't have to," I answered. "We can go in by the front walk. There's the house. The second one."

I could tell that he remembered it, and he began to walk a little faster, too. It wasn't more than a minute before we were walking right into the big yard where we had both of us been before. As soon as we got round the corner of the house we stopped. The yard was full. That is, it seemed full, just the way it did that other time. Because Nathaniel and Buddie and the twins and the baby were all

there, and they were running round in the sun till it looked like more and more—and more of them. They saw us come in though, and Nathaniel came towards us, where we stood.

He had a long, gray scarf wound round him instead of an overcoat. It had red ends that hung down in the back. I think his mother thought he needed something, but it was so warm that would be enough. It made him look kind of funny though, especially when you saw the hat he had on. It was a little dark blue linen one, like the kind you wear in summer, and it dropped way down over his face. I don't believe I would have known it was Nathaniel if it hadn't been for his size, but that was just the same that it was the last time. About like Peaty's.

"Hullo," he said, and he stopped right there in front of us.

"Hullo," I answered.

"Did you come to play?" he asked.

"No, I guess we can't stay very long," I

said. "We just thought we'd come in a few minutes."

He looked at me and then at Peaty. I am sure he remembered that we had both been there before. But he was thinking of something else, too. You could tell from his expression. In a minute he spoke again.

"Aren't you the one that stopped the runaway pony?" he said to Peaty.

Peaty looked back and then he nodded his head.

"Mother was telling us about it," Nathaniel said, and then he stood there just looking at Peaty.

I don't think Peaty liked it very much. Anyway he walked off towards the children on the other side of the yard.

Nathaniel turned round and looked after him.

"Where does he live?" he said.

I told him he lived with his aunt, and it was just behind our house.

"Do you play over there with him?" he asked.

"No," I said, "because I don't like his aunt very much," I said.

"Hasn't he got any mother?" he asked.

I told him no, he hadn't any mother or father either, and then I turned off and went walking across the yard, myself.

Nathaniel stood there a minute longer, just looking at Peaty. He was sitting down on a little green spot by the back steps with Peat, but that was because he didn't feel very strong I think, and besides that he was watching the children. Before you knew it, Nathaniel was standing there in front of him again.

"Who took care of you when you got hurt stopping the pony?" he asked.

Peaty looked up at him, and for a minute he didn't answer.

"I don't see who would do it if you didn't have any mother," he said, and then all of a sudden he changed the subject.

"Don't you want to play, too?" he asked.

Well, when he said that, Peaty glanced at the other children, and then he shook his

head. It meant he didn't want to play anything. But I told you he wasn't feeling very strong.

Nathaniel looked at him as if he didn't really understand, and Peaty turned away his head a little. Nathaniel had that same worried look that he did the day the baby was lost, but he didn't say anything more, and I sat there and watched the other children. The sun flickered round on the grass in little dancing spots and they looked as if they were all dancing round with the sun spots too. A big lilac bush over by the fence was just coming into blossom and the breeze blew the smell of the lilacs right across the yard. I took in a good sniff and Peaty looked all about him. Peat was asleep with his eyes half-shut, on the grass, beside him.

"I wish I lived here," Peaty said.

It sounded almost as if he was talking to himself, and I don't think he even knew he said it. But I heard it and so did Nathaniel. He turned his head round very quickly. His face

still had that worried look and pretty soon he turned round, and went up the steps into the house. I looked at the door where he had just gone in and it didn't seem much more than a minute before it opened and Nathaniel came out again. There was a lady just beside him and Nathaniel had his hand in hers as if he was pulling her along a little to make her walk faster. It was the same one that we had seen the day the baby was lost, so of course we knew it was his mother. She had on some brown clothes that were just about the color of her hair and she had pink in her cheeks. She was smiling at Nathaniel and glancing down round the yard, and Nathaniel was looking up at her and explaining so fast that his cheeks seemed to be getting a little pink, too.

"Here he is!" we could hear him say, and he pulled at her hand a little harder. "Here he is right down here!"

She was almost laughing at him as they came down the steps, but when she stepped down onto the grass she stopped a minute and

stood looking at us. I think she remembered who we were. Anyway she took a few steps toward us.

"Why, yes," she said, and stopped again. "Why, it's Peaty," she said, with the smile going away from her face as she looked down. "Why, yes indeed, I know all about Peaty."

He stood up then and she held out her hand a little and then she took his face between both her hands, for just a second, and looked at it.

"I know all about Peaty," she said in a low voice.

Nathaniel was trying to whisper something to her and she leaned over to hear it. Then she laughed.

"Don't you think I have *almost* enough children already?" she asked.

Nathaniel looked at Peaty as much as to say why didn't he speak, and then he began feeling at his mother's dress sleeve.

"Well, he said he'd like to live here, too, anyway," he whispered.

Peaty heard him and he turned very red, and Nathaniel's mother reached out to him again.

"I'm sorry there isn't a little more room," she said, and she patted his cheek first and then Nathaniel's. "You must be careful and not let him get too tired," she said. "You must look after him, Natty."

She turned then, to go in the house, and I guess we all watched her as she went up the steps. Just as she got to the top, she turned round and looked back.

"There goes Donny!" she said. "Go and pick him up, Nathaniel."

She meant that the baby had tipped over, and Nathaniel didn't waste any time. As he came back towards the steps, leading Donny by the hand, she looked down from where she stood at the top again, and her eyes seemed to be smiling right at Peaty.

"How would you like to be in poor Nathaniel's place?" she said. "Aren't you glad you *aren't* in poor Nathaniel's place?"

She kissed her hand to the baby and the rest, and the breeze blew her hair and made the smell of lilacs so strong that she took in a quick breath, and then she turned and went in the house.

Nathaniel looked after her and then he looked at Peaty.

"Are you?" he said.

Peaty was looking at the door where she had just gone in.

"Are you?" Nathaniel repeated.

"Are you what?" Peaty asked in a small voice.

"Are you glad you aren't me?"

Peaty shook his head quite slowly.

"Would you like to be me?"

Nathaniel had to wait a minute that time, but Peaty nodded his head.

"She thinks you wouldn't like it because you'd sometimes have to chase the baby."

Nathaniel had to wait a little longer.

"I wouldn't be afraid of that," Peaty said.

And that time it was Peaty that had to wait.

When Nathaniel did speak again though, he seemed in a hurry to say it.

"I'd just as soon change with you, if you wouldn't be afraid," he said. "Would you be afraid?"

Peaty shook his head slower than before.

"All right," Nathaniel said, "*I'm* not afraid! I'd just as soon change with you!"

I didn't really know what he was talking about.

"I'd just as soon change with you!" he kept saying. "You can be me if you want to."

He began unfastening the long, gray scarf, with the red ends, as if perhaps that was a good way to begin, and Peaty began to look a little scared. He had on a light overcoat, himself, that came down below his knees. It wasn't really cold enough for it, but I think they wanted to be very careful of him, and Peaty looked down as if he didn't really know what was going to happen next. Nathaniel had the scarf all off by this time, and he held it out to Peaty.

"If mother sees you'd just as leave be me, I guess maybe she'll feel different," he said. "You aren't afraid, are you?"

For a minute Peaty looked as if perhaps he was after all. But he answered just the same.

"I said I wasn't," he said, in kind of a faint voice, but he looked at the long, gray scarf as if he felt a little confused. I saw that he would like a little help and it was easy enough to take off the light overcoat, if that was what Nathaniel meant. Then I started to wind the scarf round him. I don't think it looked just the way it did on Nathaniel, but it was about the same, too, and Nathaniel buttoned up the light overcoat.

"We have to change hats, too," he said. So they changed hats, and then Nathaniel and Peaty stood there looking at each other. And you would have been surprised yourself if you could have seen them.

Well, just at that very minute the baby began to cry. Nathaniel started off, without

even thinking, I guess. And then he stopped and glanced back at Peaty.

"Could you—could you try picking him up?" he asked.

As he said it, the door opened and his mother stood there with a little box of growing flowers in her hand. They looked like pansies, and she put the box down in a sunny spot on the steps and then she looked up.

Peaty was starting very slowly across the yard, with his head down, and she watched him. The linen hat came down over his face, and the red ends of the scarf dragged a little on the ground. She gave a quick look back at Nathaniel, but he was sitting down on the little warm, green spot, with his hands in the overcoat pockets and his head way down in the collar. As Peaty picked up the baby, she gave another quick look around her and went back into the house.

"Would you know the difference?" Nathaniel whispered, and Peaty turned round to come back. That wasn't all. The baby turned

round to follow him. Nathaniel looked a little worried then.

"Perhaps he'll know the difference," he said, and Nathaniel hopped up and disappeared round the corner of the house. But *that* wasn't quite all either. The baby gave one look at Peaty, and then he started right off after Nathaniel. *The baby knew.* Peaty reached out his hand as if he would stop him, but the baby wouldn't stop. So I started in to see what I could do, myself. I dodged round in front of him, just as he was going round the corner, and then I kind of dragged him along by the back of the collar till we were about in the middle of the yard again.

Well, the baby didn't like the way I did it I guess. From the way he hollered you wouldn't have thought so, anyway. Peaty came right along with all Nathaniel's clothes on, and I ran right back to the little green spot. I thought if Peaty was going to fool the baby and be Nathaniel he would probably do it better alone.

But the thing of it was, the baby didn't seem to be fooled. He gave one look at Peaty as much as to say, what was that, he would like to know, and then he got right down on the ground and began to kick. But that wasn't the worst of it. The kicking wasn't half so bad as the noise he made. Peaty leaned over and tried to get him up, and I guess it would have been almost as well if he hadn't tried it. Anyway you never heard anything like the racket then, since you were born. Peat had been asleep, with one eye half open, but he opened both eyes now and looked at him. And the children stopped playing and looked at him, because it was really enough to scare anybody. It did scare Nathaniel. And he came running round the corner of the house and across the yard as if he couldn't get there fast enough. Then he leaned over and began picking up the baby.

Of course everybody thought that would make it all right but it didn't. Because the baby gave a glance at Nathaniel and instead

of improving him it seemed to make him feel worse than ever, if anything. I could see what it was. *He didn't like his clothes.* And the noise he made was awful. Nathaniel looked up at Peaty standing there with the gray scarf wound round him and the linen hat, and then Peaty started in to help. It would have been better if he hadn't. Because the baby looked from one to the other of them and there was something about it that seemed to make him feel just about desperate.

I don't really know what would have happened next, if it hadn't been for his mother. But she was on the way. She had heard it all from inside the house and she was coming as fast as she could, across the yard.

They stepped back a little when they saw her, and she reached down and picked up the baby. She lifted him way up till he was looking right off over her shoulder and her hand came down on his back in little pats. He choked and spluttered a little but it wasn't anything compared to what he *was* doing, and

it meant he was going to stop in a minute or so.

"It's time for his nap," his mother said. "He's just as tired as he can be."

She hadn't looked at the rest of us much, but she glanced round then.

"Nathaniel, I wish you'd bring down the pansy box," she said, looking up at the steps and then at the flower bed that ran from the lilac bush along the fence. I'm coming out in a few minutes to do some transplanting.

Both Nathaniel and Peaty looked up at the box on the steps, and then she went in with the baby in her arms. Nathaniel spoke in a low voice.

"I'll go and get it," he said. "I guess I understand that better than you do."

Peaty stood there and watched him. The linen hat drooped round his face and the red ends of the scarf drooped on the ground and he looked a good deal discouraged. Nathaniel glanced up at him as he came back and put the box down.

"She said she was coming back again," he said.

Peaty began picking at the scarf as if he felt just a little nervous.

"I know it," he replied, in quite a faint voice.

Nathaniel reached up his hand.

"Look!" he whispered. "She's coming now! Don't take it off! Don't take it off *now! If she sees you can be me—she'll*—feel different."

Peaty didn't answer. He only stood there beside the lilac bush and watched her coming. The little linen hat drooped down on his face and the red ends of the scarf hung down on the ground. He seemed to have lost his courage entirely now.

Nathaniel leaned forward.

"You don't want to look *that* way!" he whispered. "She'll know right off, if you look *that* way! Hop round or something—can't you? Why, she'll know in a minute!"

Peaty looked back, and it almost seemed as if he didn't care if she did. I suppose he wasn't feeling very strong for one thing, and another

thing he knew he wasn't Nathaniel because he —well, because he was himself. I think that was what discouraged him most.

"Run round, hop round!" whispered Nathaniel. "Don't look like that!"

Well Peaty gave a little, small hop and then he stopped. He saw that she was coming right towards him across the yard.

"Go on, *do* something!" Nathaniel almost spoke out loud he was so excited. "Do *something* anyway! You can't fool anybody that way!"

Well Peaty gave another little hop, and then he ran round in kind of a circle and then he gave another little hop.

It didn't look anything like Nathaniel, and it didn't look like anything anyone had ever seen before, either. But she was coming right ahead, and her eyes were fixed on Peaty with the queerest expression you ever saw.

He looked up at her as if perhaps he was really going to cry, and then he ran round in another little circle.

She said something in a low voice then.

"Nathaniel, dear child," she said, "what *is* the matter with you?"

She reached out and took his hand in hers.

"Don't you feel well?" she said, and she reached up the other hand and pushed the hat back from his face.

Of course it was Peaty's face. You know that. Peaty's face so white and frightened that I guess I just stared at him without speaking.

She gave a little start and her hand dropped down. His head dropped down, too, way down so that no one could see his face any more. And she just stood there looking down at the top of the little linen hat. I think it was Nathaniel that spoke first.

"We thought—we'd change places!" he said in rather small tones.

She glanced over at Nathaniel. He wiggled his foot round in the dirt a little but he spoke again.

"Because he hasn't got any mother or any-

thing—and he said he—wished he could live here!"

Before I thought I spoke myself, and I guess my voice didn't sound very large either.

"And his aunt doesn't treat him very good!" I said.

She turned her head and stood looking down at the top of the little linen hat. Then she moved her hand forward very slowly and softly too, as if she must be careful not to scare him, and then she lifted up his head.

Peaty's face was looking up at hers again. You could see it tremble and some tears were on it, and she stood there for just a minute without moving. Then she leaned down on her knees and put her arms round him with a little low sound.

Peaty made a little sound himself. He was trying to say something.

"What is it?" she said. I could hardly hear it. "What was it? Did you—think you'd be Nathaniel?"

The linen hat was way down over one eye,

and he was almost out of sight under her arm, but I heard something very small and yet kind of wet sounding, like a little cry.

"I guess I—ruther be myself!" it said.

As she stood up again I could see her give quite a quick brush at her eyes, and then she turned up the brim of the linen hat with little, quick movements and took hold of Peaty by the hand.

"Well, we'll see about that," she said. She glanced from Nathaniel across the yard at the other children playing.

"Just supposing—I should find out—I really needed one more—after all, she said like that, with little pauses. It sounded as if she was talking to herself. She gave one more glance around her, and then she held out her arms. In another minute it seemed as if they were all running into them. She seemed to have her arms around them all, anyway, but she had to give another short brush at her eyes.

"Oh, but they're nice!" she said laughing.

"I wonder—I really wonder if they're—quite enough of them!"

Peaty had stepped off a little to one side, but she reached out her hand again.

"Come!" she said, and she went across the yard with the others close about her, and with Peaty's hand in hers.

That happened almost three weeks ago. And I have something very wonderful to tell you now. I guess you won't believe it, but it is all decided. Peaty is going to live with the Big Family. It is about all I can do to believe it myself, and when I started out to write this book of course I never imagined that anything like that was going to happen. As you think it over, though, doesn't it seem as if it had come out almost the very way you would like to have it? Mother says it couldn't be any better, anyway. She says it is much better than Mrs. Merritt's would have been, and that he will feel more at home with the Mother of the Big Family than with anyone else she could pos-

sibly think of. Another thing, perhaps you remember that even if Mrs. Merritt had decided to take Peaty, she couldn't have had Peat. Well, the Big Family are going to have not only Peaty but Peat. They say they have wanted him since the first time they ever saw him.

And so, if I ever got discouraged with my book about "Mothers and Fathers," I feel better now, and I guess you do, too. Because I am sure there couldn't be a better Mother anywhere than the Mother of the Big Family, and I'm sure there couldn't be anybody who needs her any more than Peaty does—to take care of him.

It really seems to me like about the nicest thing that ever happened to anybody. And I guess it seems that way to Peaty, too. Anyway, every time that anyone sees him nowadays, his face is all covered with little smiles. You can't wonder much, can you?

THE END